

Welcome Home Theseus

Posted originally on the [Archive of Our Own](http://archiveofourown.org/works/36117730) at <http://archiveofourown.org/works/36117730>.

Rating:	General Audiences
Archive Warning:	Creator Chose Not To Use Archive Warnings
Category:	Gen
Fandoms:	Minecraft (Video Game) , Dream SMP
Relationships:	Ranboo & TommyInnit (Video Blogging RPF) , Kristin Rosales Watson & Phil Watson , TommyInnit & Kristin Rosales Watson , Niki Nihachu & TommyInnit , Jack Manifold & Niki Nihachu , Toby Smith Tubbo & TommyInnit , Technoblade & TommyInnit (Video Blogging RPF) , Niki Nihachu & Technoblade , Niki Nihachu & Ranboo , Ranboo & Toby Smith Tubbo & TommyInnit , Chayanne (QSMP) & Phil Watson Philza , Chayanne (QSMP) & TommyInnit (Video Blogging RPF) , Chayanne (QSMP) & Technoblade (Video Blogging RPF)
Characters:	TommyInnit (Video Blogging RPF) , Ranboo (Video Blogging RPF) , Technoblade (Video Blogging RPF) , Niki Nihachu , Sam Awesamdude , Eryn Cyberonix , Luke Punz , Cassie Anne Snifferish , Floris Fundy , Jack Manifold , Ponk DropsByPonk (Video Blogging RPF) , Alexis Quackity , Hannah Hannahxxrose , Toby Smith Tubbo , Aimee Aimsey (Video Blogging RPF) , Eret (Video Blogging RPF) , Kristin Rosales Watson , Phil Watson Philza , Chayanne (QSMP) , FitMC (Video Blogging RPF)
Additional Tags:	Alternate Universe - Superheroes/Superpowers , Dream SMP Ensemble are Superheroes , Winged Phil Watson (Video Blogging RPF) , Sleepy Bois Inc as Family , TommyInnit Needs a Hug (Video Blogging RPF) , allium duo , BAMF Niki Nihachu , No beta we die like REDACTED , Villain Jschlatt (Video Blogging RPF) , Unreliable Narrator , Angst with a Happy Ending , TommyInnit-centric (Video Blogging RPF) , Hero TommyInnit (Video Blogging RPF) , Superhero TommyInnit (Video Blogging RPF) , Sheep Hybrid Cara CaptainPuffy , Goat Hybrid Toby Smith Tubbo , Fox Hybrid Floris Fundy , Ranboo & TommyInnit Friendship (Video Blogging RPF) , Ranboo Needs a Hug (Video Blogging RPF) , Secret Identity , Identity Reveal , It Gets Worse Before It Gets Better , Found Family , Self-Indulgent , Good Parent Phil Watson (Video Blogging RPF) , Hurt/Comfort , Miscommunication , Mumza is alive and will stay that way , Minor Character Death , Baker Niki Nihachu , Protective Technoblade (Video Blogging RPF) , i thought angst would be funny and it was
Language:	English
Collections:	*consumes the angst* , DSMP Fics in my Ultimate Quotebook , My fics that i love , Ash's Favorite Incomplete MCYT Fics , to read or not to read that is the question , fics i eat for breakfast , bee's fics for ariel , the universe admires these works of art , Literally the embodiment of 'chefs kiss' , DSB(DreamSmpBooks) , reallyreallywanttoread , *sobs in corner clutching onto fic for dear life* , DSMP
Stats:	Published: 2022-01-01 Updated: 2024-02-04 Words: 294,447 Chapters: 68/69

Welcome Home Theseus

by [soulfirephoenix](#)

Summary

Under the oppressive regime of President Schlatt, Tommy managed to find his place as Theseus, an apprentice to one of the best heroes in the country and an up-and-coming household name, content with his quiet civilian life as the adopted son of Kristin Walters, chief commissioner of Manberg's police force.

Hit by a series of tragedies, he's left to face his worst fears, questioning the only things he was certain of. Allegiances untangle in the face of the ever-present threat of the Syndicate, forced to navigate the new uncertain world he's thrown into with little more than wit and some guy called Ranboo who won't leave him alone

pspspst come get your allium duo crumbs :)

(Don't be nervous about the chapters, I know it looks like a lot but they're only around 3-4k words each)

Notes

This is based on characters NOT the creators

Currently under rewrite to remove certain characters, up to CHAPTER 19 has been rewritten. At this point Chayanne's character no longer replaces Wilbur's, so while you can read on it may be a little confusing at points

See the end of the work for more [notes](#)

Chapter 1

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

A pen clattered against the desk, breaking the low hum of conversation. It fell just short of the cup Tommy was aiming for, joining a small heap of small objects around it. He glanced up, checking if anyone at the table had noticed.

A slight, pink-haired woman in an armoured blue wetsuit was watching him with a half-smile, a blue mask over her eyes, the tall fox hybrid sat next to her conspicuously eating jerky, slipping pieces out from a pocket in his jacket.

To his right was a man in a white hoodie with a white band tied around his head, a ball of fire spinning on his fingertips that he was tossing from hand to hand lazily. His apprentice stood at his shoulder, wearing practically the same but all in black, a mischievous glint in his eye as he watched Blaze's fireball.

A sudden noise of a throat being cleared drew his attention across to one of the strangest people at the table, a fair achievement all things considered. He was half robot, a metal plate covering his left eye, his left arm, leg and shoulder made out of metal. The eye on his human side was blue, the robotic one a dull red, hair in a short buzz cut, metal fingers tapping on the table impatiently, clearly disapproving of whatever was being said.

No one was paying a boy with a pen any attention, so he snatched up the next one, levelling it in his fingers, closing one eye.

“Theseus, if you don’t mind.” The Warden leaned on his trident, glaring down the table. He made for an intimidating sight, dressed head to toe in dark, gunmetal armour, a gas mask over his nose and mouth glowing an acid green, a matching trident in his hand.

He glared down at Tommy with an all too familiar expression, though the effect was a little weakened by the pile of paperwork he was standing over, and the odd contrast to the motherly sheep hybrid sat next to him wearing a tricorn hat, pouring over the meeting notes, barely tall enough to reach his elbow.

On his other side the short figure in a black hoodie and red balaclava gave him a little wave.

“Supreme you're not helping.” Puffy said quietly. Ponk just grinned at her, spinning around on their chair completely unphased by the deathly glare the Warden levelled at them.

“Tsunami, keep your student in check.” The pink-haired woman shifted in her seat, looking bored.

“There’s worse things he could be doing.” She said dismissively but gave him a quick, warning look. He stuffed the rest of the pens in a pouch on his belt, pulling faces at the fox hybrid across the table, Fundy responding in kind.

Purple eyed him enviously, glued to Punz’s side. His mentor was leaning against the table, engaged in the conversation, but not enough to take his eye off him. Fundy got bored of the face-off after a bit, looking around for another form of entertainment. He chucked a piece of jerky at Punz’s back, but the

meta snatched it out of the air without even looking, giving it a disdainful look and tossing it into the bin.

Spark egged him on silently, shifting from foot to foot, Blaze watching with a half-smile, rolling the ball of fire around on his knuckles.

"Is there anything else?" The Warden's voice cut through the silent shenanigans, the room's occupants sitting to attention automatically, like school children in trouble.

The Captain glanced up from her notes, pushing up the brim of her hat. "Other than the Sponsors Ball tomorrow but I think most people are aware...."

"Oh for fucks sake." Blaze sat back in his chair, kicking his feet up on the table. "Again?"

"That's the meaning of annual." The Warden said wryly. "It repeats, and I expect you *all* to be there."

"Uh I don't know if you saw my request but my grandma's funeral is...."

"Foxtrot with all due respect, this is the fourth grandma's funeral you've had to attend." The Captain said wearily. The fox hybrid looked indifferent.

"That's a personal matter."

"This month." She continued.

"One was last month!"

The Warden waved an armoured hand, cutting him off. "Leave denied. Anyone with any legitimate concerns regarding the ball, speak now."

"If I wanted to do small talk I wouldn't have signed up to a job punching things for a living." Punz grumbled, tossing a knife between his hands.

"This isn't up for discussion. Anything else?" There were shaking heads around the table. "Then we're done here."

He slammed his trident down once as a dismissal and the heroes rose from the table in a clamour. Chatter started to break out, flocking into groups as they headed towards the door, streaming out of the room as quickly as possible.

Tommy hovered, waiting for his mentor to escape the crush of people so he could catch her.

A figure bumped into his side and he looked up to see the robot man glaring down at him, clearly about to say something. He was saved seconds later by Tsunami's arrival, Android abruptly cutting off whatever was on his mind to give her a surprisingly warm smile before vanishing.

"Android's in a bad mood." He noted. Tsunami raised one eyebrow.

"Probably something to do with you leaving all the training equipment out, again."

"That was Eryn!" He protested. "I swear, I told you, Blaze's just covering for him, I wasn't there!"

"Then why was some of the equipment found up in the rafters, Spark can conjure fire, he can't do that" He began to grin, caught in the lie and she patted his shoulder. "I've known you for too long for this. Stop messing with Jack, I don't want to have to fill out any more forms."

"Tsunami, Theseus?" He looked up to see the Warden watching them both. "Stay behind. I want a word with you." She walked over, hands on her hips, dwarfed next to him. "What is it?"

"I sent you an application, you haven't responded."

"Theseus turned it down." She cut him off. "We've made it clear we're not interested."

"You have two apprentices on your hands..."

"It's not my decision whether they come or go, and they've both decided to stay."

"You're overworking yourself."

"You're the one scheduling my hours." She folded her arms, daring him to argue. The Warden inclined his head.

"Touché." He looked over at Tommy. "I know you're listening, you may as well join us."

He slid off the table, walking over as slowly as he could, dragging his feet. It didn't get a rise out of the older man, it didn't even phase him. He fixed Theseus in an unblinking stare, tightening his grip on his trident. "Every meeting this happens."

"Well maybe if you didn't make them so boring..."

"Theseus." Tsunami said sharply. He hung his head, deliberately not making eye contact.

"Sorry Warden. It won't happen again."

It was impossible to make out his expression behind the gas mask, and his eyes gave nothing away, the same blank stare as always. "You'll also be taking on District 7 in addition to your current patrols."

"But what about Rose?" Tommy piped up

"Out of commission. Which you would have known if you were paying attention in the meeting." Tsunami tossed over her shoulder.

"Again?" Tommy demanded

A flash of annoyance crossed the Warden's eyes, just for a split second, before it was gone again.

"It'll be a temporary thing."

"That's what you said last time we got a new district." She pointed out.

"And based on what we knew at the time, that was true. I'm sorry, but it's not up for debate."

"That's shit," Tommy muttered.

“You can take District 6 as well if you want.” His tone was flat, but somehow still threatening for it. “Blaze and Spark have taken it on for now but I can always let them know they’re relieved of their duties.”

“Not it’s fine, we understand, thank you Warden. We’ll see you next time.” Tsunami grabbed Tommy by the shoulder, guiding him out of the room quickly. She marched him away as quickly as possible, only relaxing when they were at the end of the corridor. “Do you have to antagonise him every time?”

“He was asking for it.” Tommy reached for a pen only to find a piece of jerky slipped in with it, though he had no recollection of putting it in there. He shrugged, taking a bite, before spitting it out, throwing it into the nearest bin

“That’s fucking disgusting, why does Fundy like that stuff.” He brushed his hands off. “Anyway, what happened to Rose?”

“Wing got shot through in a burglary. It’s not pretty, it’ll take a while to heal.”

“Oh.” He looked at the floor. “I didn’t know that.”

“Maybe if you’d paid attention.” She reprimanded him gently. “Rather than messing around in the back the whole time.”

“I don’t get why they need me to be here.” He protested. “It’s useless.”

“I told you, it’s practice.” She smiled slightly. “And besides, if we have to suffer you should too.”

He pushed her arm, without much venom behind it. “You’re so mean to me.”

“You’ve had every option to get rid of me. They’ve tried reassigning you.” She reminded him. “Multiple times.”

He rolled his eyes. “Yeah but Blaze is angry all the time and already has Eryn, Foxtrot is annoying and...”

“The Warden offered to take you on.” She reminded him.

Tommy paused for a minute. “No sense of humour. Can you imagine?”

“I’d like to see him try.” She agreed. “I’d be placing bets on how long he’d last.”

Tommy nodded along. “Exactly. He’d make me work. It would be boring.”

“I’m not exactly letting you get away with no work.”

He stretched lazily, giving her an easy smile. “Well you’re friends with Kristin, so it’s fine.”

“So my only redeeming factor is being friends with your mum and not my own abilities as a hero, or my outstanding record, or any of those things?” She teased him. “How rude.”

“That’s not what I meant!”

She pressed her palm against a scanner by one of the doors, waiting. It turned green, the door sliding open with a hiss. “So you want a mentor who can report your every failure back to your parent?”

His eyes grew wide in dismay. “You wouldn’t!”

The door slid closed behind them with another hiss. "I might."

"Mm, sounds like you want to get rid of me."

She looked back over her shoulder. "You're a handful."

He opened his mouth to retort but was cut off by quick hoofsteps behind them. "Hey. Niki." Tsunami spun around, relaxing as she saw the source of the voice.

"Hi Puffy!" The ram hybrid trotted over with a warm smile, a pile of folders clutched in her arms. She waved at Tommy awkwardly around her notes, trying to stop them spilling across the floor, teetering back and forth in her arms, rubbing her eyes.

"You look exhausted." Niki said, worried. "The Warden overworking you too?"

The Captain shook her head patiently. "That's unfair, he's trying his best."

"We have another new patrol district."

"It's a job best split between several people, and you have spare hands." The Captain tried to make light of it, but the strained look on her face gave her away. Tsunami patted her on the shoulder.

"You don't have to say nice things about him, there's no one listening."

"He's not that bad." Puffy insisted. "He's a sweetheart."

"Somewhere, deep down," Tommy muttered

"If only he knew the things you said about him behind his back." She teased, adjusting the pile of paper in her arms. A sheet floating loose and Tommy snatched it out of the air, placing it back on top.

"He won't." Tsunami said confidently. "You wouldn't tell on a friend."

"You're right, I wouldn't." Puffy glanced over at Tommy with a slight smile. "Oh, and you're not a great shot with a pen."

"Yeah well, Spark wasn't exactly behaving himself either." Tsunami jumped to his defense before he had to say anything. "Don't blame him."

"Blaze gets in a bad mood if his brother gets told off." Puffy reminded her. "For the peace of the meeting, it's best to let him. Where are you two heading?"

"Training hall. Are you gonna join us?" Tommy asked. She looked down at the stack of papers despairingly.

"I should get started on these, or I won't be done 'til late."

"What a fall." Tsunami said, wholly unsympathetic. "The Captain herself, reduced to a fancy secretary."

"Well someone has to. Unless you're volunteering to help?" She was joking, but there was definitely a hopeful note. A shred of sympathy flashed across Niki's expression.

“We booked the gym, and I’m already behind on Theseus’s training hours. But I can grab takeout later.” She offered. “I’ll bring it up and help you then?”

“I’d like that,” Puffy said, looking very relieved. She stopped outside an office door, pushing the handle down with her elbow carefully. “I’ll see you later.”

“See you later.” She shoved her door open, dumping the folders on the desk, letting it swing shut behind her with a thud.

The training hall was one of the largest rooms in the building, easily two stories tall, equipped with a climbing wall, training rings, gymnastics equipment, a rack of all kinds of weapons, and nothing less than a whole wrecking ball hanging in the center, deep scars carved out of the metal by past training sessions. There was a gym and swimming pool connected to it, both more dimly lit to give heroes a chance to exercise without their masks without giving away their identities.

“Can we train on the wrecking ball today? Please?”

She shook her head. “Sparring today.”

“Again?” He visibly wilted in place.

“Again.” She agreed. “It’s not like you’ll ever have to fight a wrecking ball, so this is better practice.”

“I could totally fight it though.” He declared. “I bet I could take it. I’d wreck it’s shit right back.”

“Your suit isn’t made to withstand a direct hit from a wrecking ball.” She tapped his chest plate. “It’s glorified plastic, to be honest.”

“I can get a better suit.”

“Not until you graduate. And even then there are limits.”

“That makes no sense.” He whined. “How come you get all the cool tech. I don’t get proper armour, I can’t even breathe underwater and shit.”

“Breathing underwater isn’t cool tech, that’s just something I can do.” She corrected

“That’s overpowered.” He complained.

“Well I’m...sorry?” She looked baffled. “I don’t know what I’m supposed to do about it?”

“Wouldn’t you give the kids more protective gear?” He made himself some space at the edge, starting to do some quick warm-up stretches

“I certainly would.” She dragged a mat out, throwing it down in the middle of the floor, heading over to the weapons rack. “But I don’t make the decisions around here.”

“You should.”

That earned a bitter laugh. “You see how much I get talked over now. Imagine what it would be like if I was in charge.” She pulled a staff out of the rack, tossing it to him, and he snatched it out of the air,

falling into a defensive position on one end of the mat. “Right foot back, put more of your weight on it.”

She took one of her own, spinning it around experimentally, before nodding in approval, mirroring his stance. “Ready?”

He was distracted for a moment by a yell of success on the other side of the hall, a ring of knives circling a target in front of Purpled. Three quick taps on his head, shoulder, and knees and he was bought straight back around. “Keep your eye on your opponent at all times.” She reminded him. “Are you ready?”

He started forward in response. They sparred in near silence for a while, falling into an easy, practiced routine, Tsunami quietly correcting his footing, and technique as they went. He caught her once or twice, mainly when she let him, to help him get the hang of a technique but as it went on she gave him less and less leeway, he knew the techniques well enough, she was testing his ability under pressure. He lost count of how many times he fell, she didn’t hold back, pushing him further and further across the mat.

He stumbled suddenly, falling harder than normal with a wince of pain. She finally put her staff aside, concerned. “Are you alright?”

“Fine.” He pushed himself up stiffly, and she held her hand out in a gesture of peace.

“Good work.”

He took it sullenly. “I didn’t stand a chance.”

“Don’t compare yourself to me, I’ve been doing this for much longer than you have. You’re doing well for your age.” She pulled him up, dusting his shoulder off, checking him over for injuries.

“Yeah well you beat Achilles once. What am I gonna do?”

She shook her head. “Those are rumours, and they’re exaggerated. I just disarmed him, I told you.”

He shook his head, dropping back into his defensive stance. “That’s so cool though!”

“But took me years and I barely escaped alive.” She added.

“I know I know.” He took a quick swig from his water bottle, throwing it back to the side of the mat, picking his staff up again. “One day I’ll be able to take him though.”

“This isn’t the time for your arrogance Theseus.” Niki said sharply. “Are you listening to me?”

“Sure.” He lied. She locked her staff under his, twisting it out of his grip, slamming him down onto the floor with barely any effort, holding it to his throat.

“Listen. I don’t care what you learn from me, you’re smart, you could pick fighting up from anyone. The one lesson you need to get in your head is, do not approach the Syndicate. Don’t think about it, if you see them, run, don’t talk to them, don’t try and fight them, you won’t stand a chance. Do you understand me?”

He didn't reply, and she took his silence as her answer, moving back to let him up, looking troubled. "We're done for today."

He scrambled to his feet, picking up his weapon. "But we've barely done anything?"

"Go home. It's getting late, I'll just say I sent you on some errand if anyone asks."

He set the staff down carefully. "Are you sure?"

She didn't meet his eyes, grabbing the mat, shoving it back against the wall. "I promised the Captain I'd help her out, and she looks like she needs it."

He rolled his shoulders back, massaging out the ache that was already building up. "You're the best." She shook her head, her expression fond, sweeping up a pile of weapons left discarded on the ground.

"Go on, before I change my mind." He didn't hesitate, snatching his bag up from the lockers, running for the exit. "Don't forget the..."

"Ball tomorrow I know!" His voice trailed off into the distance as he ran down the corridor, taking the steps two at a time, not looking back

Chapter End Notes

This is the first time I've written a full-length book in a while, so please be kind. Any comments or even kudos are very welcome!

Chapter 2

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

The front door slammed behind him, and he kicked his shoes off into the corner, tossing his coat over the hook, leaning against the wall at the bottom of the stairs. “Kristin! I’m home!”

“Hi home!” A voice called back down. Kristin appeared at the top of the stairs pushing a strand of dark hair out of her eyes, looking tired. He threw his bag down, running up to her, and she caught him, enveloping him in a tight hug. “Hey Toms.” He buried his head in the soft wool of her sweater, leaning against her wearily.

“Hi mum.”

She ruffled his hair gently. “How was your day?”

He shrugged, not moving. “It was fine.”

“That bad huh?” She smelled like oranges and cinnamon, a familiar, comforting smell. He settled into the crook of her arm, content not to move for a little while.

“How do I get you to let go?”

“You don’t really want me to.” He mumbled.

She laughed softly. “No, but dinner’s getting cold.”

“Food?” He pulled away immediately, wandering into the kitchen. He pulled out a chair at the island, snatching an apple from the fruit bowl, biting into it hungrily.

“So what did you do today?” She followed him in, heading over to the oven, checking the pots on the stove.

“Meetin’s” He managed around the chunk of apple.

“Don’t speak with your mouth full.” She chided, pulling open one of the cupboards. He gulped it down quickly.

“Niki says hi.”

She began to busy herself around the counter, pulling a pot off the stove. “How is she?”

Tommy shrugged. “Mean.”

That prompted a soft laugh. “I take it training went well.” He groaned wordlessly, planting his head on the table. “I can run you a hot bath while you eat.”

“I don’t wanna bath.” He complained

“You need to take care of your injuries, or you’ll feel like an old man before you get to thirty.”

“I’m fine. I’m not old.”

“Yes, now.” She pointed a wooden spoon at him. “Later you’ll pay for it.”

He leaned his head on his hand, watching her work. “We didn’t even train for that long. She let me go home early.”

“She always does on a Friday.” She pushed a bowl of pasta over, covered with grated cheese. He waited for her to sit down, and then began to eat hungrily, shovelling it in like he hadn’t eaten all day.

“You’re the best cook ever.” He informed her, around a mouthful of half-chewed food.

She laughed at that, shaking her head. “I don’t think so, but thank you. Now slow down, or you’ll get hiccups.”

“Can’t get hiccups.” He mumbled through. “Big man and shit, I’m too powerful for hiccups.”

“Is that so.” She ran the tap, filling a glass of water and pushing it across to him. “So what was the meeting about?”

“Highly classified information.” He informed her, looking smug. “Couldn’t possibly tell you.”

“I know you well enough to tell that that’s code for you didn’t pay attention.” She said with a knowing smile.

“Rose is in hospital again.” He took another mouthful. “I heard that.” He conveniently failed to mention he only heard it afterwards.

“I know. My officers found her yesterday evening, poor thing.” She said sympathetically. “Robbery intervention went wrong, she got the culprits but her wing is torn again. She’s really much too fragile for this line of work.”

Tommy grimaced slightly. “It’s not like we have many other options.”

“No I know. It’s not fair though.” Her phone buzzed, and she scowled at it.

“What is it?” He tried to sit up to get a better look, but she hid the screen from him.

“Reminder for some forms I need to fill out.” It went off again, and she glanced back down, reading the text. “Eret’s expecting you at the bookshop at 9am tomorrow.”

He visibly wilted, fork half way to his mouth. “Do I have to?”

“That was the condition, you need to get normal work experience.”

He threw his fork down in frustration. “It’s not even like I’ll be allowed a normal job!”

“There’s still a chance of you getting a citizen’s license.” She said stubbornly, but the words were empty, the same repetition of an argument they had nearly every Friday.

“The bar for that is like webbed fingers or something, you have to be basically completely normal.” He protested. “If Rose can’t get it, I’m never going to get it.”

“You’re the one who insisted on finishing school early for this. You knew the deal.” She reminded him.

“I didn’t really have a choice.” He said sullenly. “I only levitated one kid as well.”

She paused over the hob for a moment. “Well. I mean of all the things to be expelled for it’s unique, at least.”

“Nobody even got hurt!”

Kristin shook her head sadly. “We’ve been over this. The world isn’t kind Tommy, you know that, and I know that, especially not to people like you. We can only make the best of it.”

“But...”

“I’m not having this argument every time.” She set a pan down on the table. “It is what it is. What would yelling at me change?”

“I dunno.” He mumbled. “Makes me feel better.”

“But it doesn’t make me feel much better, so I don’t think it helps either of us.” She reasoned. He prodded his food, his appetite suddenly gone.

“Sorry.”

She leaned over, giving him a quick hug, starting to head towards the door. “Don’t worry about it. There’s some more food if you need it, help yourself.”

“You gotta go already?” He protested weakly, but it was no use.

“Important phone call, I’ll eat later. Niki normally lets you go earlier so I thought I’d have more time.”

“Long meeting.” He said by way of explanation.

“Alright. Don’t stay up too late.” She ruffled his hair, grabbing a cup of coffee off the counter, heading back to her office again.

He finished up the plate, rinsing it off in the sink and leaving it to dry, sitting in the kitchen for a while playing games on his phone. When he passed by the office the light was still on. He hovered by the door for a moment, but the phone began to ring again, and she picked it up. He walked back to his room slowly, dragging his feet, half hoping it would finish and she would come out again, but there was no such luck, the distant voices from the office continuing late into the night.

She was already gone by the time he woke up the next morning, leaving behind an envelope on the table with some money. He turned it over to find a small doodle of a sandwich, and a handwritten note.

‘Didn’t have time to make lunch, get yourself something nice :)’

Mum’

He grabbed the marker, drawing a pair of eyes on the sandwich, leaving the envelope and taking the money, tucking it into his coat, swinging his bag onto his back, walking down to the bus stop. He mumbled a quick good morning to the driver, keeping his head down, flicking through a well-read comic, the pages creased from use. The bus took him to the city centre, which left him with a reasonably short walk. Eret's shop was a little way from the city center, in a small enclosed market in the former industrial part of the city, old warehouses and a small dockyard, now mostly trendy apartments, cafes, and an exclusive shopping district.

A small squad of Enforcers stood at the entrance to the market, all in black, in a bulletproof vests, a balaclava pulled over their faces, wearing the silver rams head emblem on their arm. They almost looked comically out of place among the crowds, standing by a booth and barricade blocking access to the market, but the machine guns slung over their shoulders prevented any jokes of that kind.

"Papers." He opened his bag, digging around, handing over his ID. The Enforcer snatched it out of his hand, glancing it over, studying his face intently. "Where are you going?"

"To work. Butterfly Books, it's just around the corner."

His ID was handed back after a moment and he packed it away into a safe pocket, heading down the street. The market was in an enclosed square, the shops at the side tucked under a tiled walkway, stalls set up in neat rows. It was buzzing, the early morning crowd starting to shift into the normal Saturday rush, a babble of voices rising up, vendors' cries calling out over their heads, the air thick with the smell of coffee and fresh-baked bread.

Near the back, under a sheltered eave, was the bookshop he was aiming for. It was built into one of the old buildings, a converted railway station, large window arches built out of red brick filled with packed displays of new books. It was cosy, dark oak bookshelves and a red carpet, lit with a warm amber glow. A small bell hung over the door, chiming as he pushed it open.

"Hello?"

"Tommy!" Eret strode out of the storage rooms, They were an eccentric character, long skirts swirling around her heels, brightly coloured cardigan pulled around their shoulders, matched with some oddly patterned silk scarf, Goose not far behind, always close in their shadow. Tommy knelt down, petting the cat, and she leaned against his leg, arching her back with a pleased purr. "Good to see you. How was your week?"

Tommy shrugged. "Pretty normal. Yours?"

"Very quiet, actually." They scowled out of the window. "Less people coming, for some reason."

"Oh yeah, I saw they doubled the Enforcers in the entrance." He noted. "Did something happen?"

"Stallholder was caught with contraband, so we all have to suffer." They said abruptly. "Don't worry about it."

He stood up, Goose circling around his legs, purring happily. "What I gotta do today?"

"Not much." He said kindly. "Just reorganising some shelves, and I have a few new boxes of books for you to sort." They saw the downcast look. "I know, your favourite, but the sooner you start, the

sooner it's done." They set a cardboard box down on the table. "There are some more in the back rooms, you know where."

Tommy heaved it off the table, trundling over to the corner, dragging the ladder over with him. It ran along a little rail at the top of the shelves, making it easy to pull around. He put his earbuds in, and settled down to work, working from A to Z of authors systematically. It was simple, and he had a half feeling Eret did most of it already. It was dull, but dull wasn't always so bad, he spent nearly every other day of the week in training or on patrol, dull could be good sometimes.

He wiped the dust off the shelf with a cloth, sliding the novels into place, writing out new labels very slowly. It was an odd quirk of Eret's shop, they insisted on hand written labels, something which Tommy would never admit looked quite good. There was a steady flow of customers, but he didn't have to pay them much mind beyond giving them vague directions now and then, most of the time Eret was on the shop floor, gliding around with a bright smile and easy conversation.

The doorbell went mid-morning, and a newspaper fell through the letterbox, landing on the mat. He picked it up curiously as he went past to get another crate of new books. It was folded over but the bold letters jumped out at him immediately.

Victory for public safety as more illegals metas were taken off the streets last night in a surprise raid of a safe house near Hotel Plaza.

There was a picture of a young woman being led away by Enforcers, a hood pulled over her head. It was snatched out of his fingers before he could even read the title, the paper tearing away, leaving him with an illegible corner.

"I'll not be having any of that in here," Eret said firmly. They marched over to the bin, crumpling it up with a rare vengeance, tossing it away. "Talk about kicking those who are already down."

"But it's funny." He complained. "And I was just looking."

They spread their arms to take in the bookshelves. "You're surrounded by some of the best writers of the last few centuries. You don't have to read tabloids." The disdain dripped from their

"But."

"Save yourself the trouble. It's the same story they've printed so many times, they just change the names and locations." They turned away, disappearing as fast as they came in a swirl of fabric, Goose following them faithfully, and that was the last time Tommy saw her all morning.

He took his lunch break a little past midday, Eret didn't care much when he came and went, so long as the job was done, browsing the stalls in the market outside. It was mainly smaller businesses from outside the city, all sorts of handmade soaps and fancy wooden bowls, all the things no one really needed but were nice to have

He picked up a loaf of fresh bread from one stall, putting it carefully in his bag so it didn't get crushed, finally settling on some kind of pie the vendor had been offering free samples of that didn't taste too bad, finding a bench a little away from the noise to eat it. A couple of pigeons gathered

around his feet, and he crumbled pieces of the pie crust, scattering it between them when no one was looking.

The afternoon was quieter, the morning rush having worn off, the market starting to pack away. He was nearly finished with the crates of new books when a familiar figure trailed in behind the lunchtime surge, one of the more unusual to come into the shop, pink hair in a plait over his shoulder, wearing a black leather jacket, hands stuffed in his pockets. Tommy perched on top of the ladder, peeking over the shelves as the door chimed, and then lit up with glee

“Technoblade!” He crowed, looking down at him.

The man looked up, and then sighed heavily. “Hello again.”

“My friend!”

“Now now, I wouldn’t go that far.” But there was a slight smile on his face. “I see you haven’t got fired yet.”

“Nope! Not yet.” Tommy replied pleasantly, an evil grin plastered across his face.

Technoblade looked at him critically, waiting for the inevitable retort. “Got anything new I might like?”

“I don’t know, haven’t looked on the history for fucking nerds section recently.”

“Oh that’s a section?” He asked dryly. “Sounds perfect, if you could just point me in the right direction I’d be much obliged.”

Tommy made direct eye contact, raising a hand and levelling it at the bin. “Right. There.”

He chuckled, shaking his head. “I should have seen that coming.”

Tommy slid down the ladder, stopping one rung short so he could be taller than the newcomer. “Sooooooo do you want anything specific or did you just come to enjoy my wonderful company.” He was promptly deliberately ignored, the man walking away slowly as if a book would leap out at him from the shelves. “You know it doesn’t cause you physical pain to ask for help.”

“Are you sure? Because I’m starting to get a headache already.” Came the dry response. “But if you insist.” He turned to face Tommy. “My brother’s birthday is coming up and I need to get him something. Any suggestions?”

“What does he like?” Techno considered that for a moment.

"Cooking, farming."

“Oh god, he sounds awful.” Tommy promptly interrupted.

“....Geography. Mostly because I’ve been teaching him.”

“Get him an atlas,” Tommy said sarcastically, grabbing another bundle of novels, clambering up the ladder again. The elder hummed in approval.

“That’s actually a great idea.”

He stopped halfway up the ladder, processing that for a second. “Great, I take full credit, did not mean that as a joke.”

Techno ignored him, trailing away to the far end of the shop. He returned with a large, leatherbound atlas, giving Tommy a polite nod as he went past. Eret appeared from the backroom, exactly on cue. “Ah, my favourite customer. I hope Tommy hasn’t been bothering you.”

“It’s Tommy, he makes it his personal mission to be botherin’ me.” Techno pointed out. “But if I minded I wouldn’t be coming back.”

Eret picked the atlas up to scan it, and then tutted, tapping a bent corner disapprovingly. “Tommy, can you grab another one from the back?”

“It’s fine,” Techno said, looking awkward. “I’ll take it.”

“I can’t possibly let you. It’ll only take a moment.” They reassured him quickly. Tommy darted into the storage room, walking through the shelves quickly. Eret had made him memorise the layout on his first week, sending him back and forth with errands until he knew it off by heart, which had been frustrating at first until it had become very useful to deal with demanding customers. He found the spares, dusting one off carefully, carrying it back out. She passed him the creased one.

“Pop this one on the window display for me. We may as well use it.”

He complied, turning it so the bent corner wasn’t visible. The door opened and shut with a chime of the bell. Eret waited until he was sure Techno couldn’t hear them before leaning against the till, amused. “Do you have to annoy him every time he comes in?”

Tommy turned back to the shelves, running his finger along the spine of a book, checking the author. “Odd man. Can’t trust a guy with pink hair.” He slipped a book in next to it, pulling another one out of the box.

“With talk like that I’ll dye your hair and see how you like it.” They commented.

Tommy scowled. “That would be a terrible idea.” They leaned back in their chair, resting their chin on the ends of their fingertips.

“And why would that be?”

“I bite.”

They laughed softly. “I’m sure you do.”

He finished sorting the last of the books away, carrying the crate back over. “You could have just sold him that book.”

“I really couldn’t. I have a good reputation,” Eret told him. “and I intend to keep it.”

“Techno wouldn’t mind. He always comes back.”

“He keeps coming back because of my reputation.” They corrected him. “I worked hard to get a shop here, and I intend to keep it. Not to mention, I love what I do, so I want it to be just perfect.”

“You’re weird.”

He laughed. “And you work for me, where does that leave you.”

“Eret!” A man wandered in, mask pulled up over his nose and mouth, hood over his head, holding a large parcel. “Where do you want this?”

“Just pop them down by the till.” She called out. He wandered over, setting it down. Tommy gave him a quick nod.

“Hi Foolish.”

“Tommy!” Foolish clapped him on the shoulder. “Good to see you.”

“You can clock out now.” Eret told him. “Foolish can help me lock up.”

“You not hanging around? Aw man.”

Tommy held up his hands. “I’ve been here since 9am, I’m out.”

Foolish’s shoulders sunk, but it didn’t last long. Goose rounded the corner and he lit up, the disappointment quickly forgotten. He scooped the cat up happily, holding her in his arms. “Hello you.”

“Are you flirting with a cat?” Tommy pulled a mocking face. “I can’t believe this.” The older man paid him no mind, fussing over the cat. He headed towards the door, pushing it half open. “Bye Eret! See you next week!”

Eret poked their head out of the back room, raising a hand. “Alright. Take care!”

It shut behind him with the familiar chime, and he headed out of the market, following the same route back through town, to the same bus, same as every week. He hunted down the spare key from behind one of the plants on the porch, letting himself in, leaving the loaf of bread on the table for Kristin to see later, gathering up some snacks and trudging upstairs to his room, flopping down on his bed with another stack of comics.

Chapter End Notes

Hiya! If you liked this any kudos or comments are very welcome.

Feel free to check out my other fics, and I’m also on Twitter at @SoulFirePhoen1x if you want updates on new AU’s/new chapter releases

Chapter 3

Chapter Summary

She jumped a little, startled by his sudden appearance. “Hello Theseus.”

“Tsunami said you were looking for me?”

“Oh, I was just wondering where you’d gone, I couldn’t see you anywhere.” She followed his enquiring look towards the man she was speaking to. “I’d like you to meet Phil Watson.”

Chapter Notes

This was going to be one long chapter but I decided to split it, so there'll probably be a double update today :)

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

“Tommy?” A hand shook him awake gently. “Tommy we need to get ready.”

He yawned, covering his mouth with a hand. “What?”

Kristin’s face faded into view above him. “The Sponsors ball, did you forget?”

He shot up, alarmed. “What’s the time?”

“Nearly eight o’clock, we don’t have long. You fell asleep on your comic.” She held up a wrinkled page, an odd look crossing her face. “The adventures of Archangel. You still have these?”

“Yeah.” He sat up, snatching it back defensively. “What about it?”

“Oh, nothing.” She set it down on the desk. “These were one of the first things I ever gave you, I didn’t know you still had them.” She turned it over, reading the back. “I don’t think there’s many of these left.”

He reached out, pulling it over, stretching out the crumpled page. “Well yeah, they’re like 30 years old.”

“Ten or fifteen at most I think.”

He wrinkled his nose, getting to his feet. “Ancient. Why don’t they make them anymore?”

She turned it around to look at the picture on the front, showing a man with large black wings soaring over a burning building. “Well. Making a profit off comics of a dead superhero isn’t generally seen as socially acceptable.”

Tommy looked at the floor. “Yeah well, he’s not actually dead is he, just missing in action. Heroes don’t die, they go missing in action unless a body is found. That’s how it works.”

Her expression fell for a moment. “Well, let’s hope that never happens.”

“Eh, I’ll be fine. I’m simply invincible. Can’t have bad shit happen to me.” He informed her. “Bad shit sees me and it fucking runs.”

“If you say so.” She replied, clearly just humouring him. “Go get ready, we’re going to be late.” He heaved himself up, stacking a pile of books on top of the comic to press the wrinkles out. His suit and armour were cleaned, folded neatly on his desk, definitely not in the pile in the corner where he’d left them. He turned to thank her, but she was already gone.

It didn’t take him long to get changed, he’d taken the suit on and off enough times to be able to do it in record time, stumbling out into the corridor, still a little sleepy. Kristin was waiting out in the corridor, wearing her formal police uniform, hair caught back in a tight bun, checking her appearance in the mirror. She turned, giving him a once over, dusting a crumb off his collar. “Don’t forget your cape.”

He groaned, ducking back inside his room, snatching up. “I hate this thing.”

“You’d better not have that attitude later.” She warned him.

“Whatever.” He sat down on the step, yanking his boots on. “It’ll be boring, we’ll leave early, I get it.”

“I know you don’t like it. I don’t like it either, but here we are.” She straightened her hat. “The car will be here in a minute.”

He rolled his eyes. “Do we really have to take a car? It’s like a fifteen minute walk away.”

“It’s just a formality.” She explained patiently.

“Well fuck formality.”

“At least you can wear your work clothes. Have you seen my formal uniform?” She turned around to show it off. “It’s stiff as cardboard.” She started to tug at her blazer, and they fell into silence for a few minutes. She carried on, pulling away at the fabric, concentrating

“What are you doing?” He asked curiously. Kristin glanced up, a piece of thread clenched between her teeth.

“Unstitching the pockets. I don’t know what asshole decided fake pockets were good.” She grumbled. “Give me a minute.”

He leaned over to get a closer look. “What’s the point of unstitching them if they’re fake.”

“They’re real pockets, they just sew them up. Waste of fabric.” She tore away the last bit, clearing away any stray threads patting it, satisfied. “There we go.”

The doorbell rang, and she brushed herself off. “That must be the car.” She strode over, opening the door. “Come on. We’re cutting it close enough as it is.”

He picked himself up. “Well, you should have woken me up earlier then.”

She sighed patiently, locking the door behind them. Nothing less than a limousine waited outside, the windows tinted, the driver holding the door open for them. Kristin rushed them in, glancing around to make sure neighbours hadn't seen Tommy, only relaxing when the door shut behind them, looking around, impressed.

The inside was all done up in white leather, spacious and comfortable, the darkened windows transparent from the inside. The other side even had a small mini fridge with a glass front, filled with small cans of coke and beer and miniature bottles of champagne. Tommy lit up when he saw it, and then wilted a little. "We can't even empty the whole thing." He said mournfully. Kristin leaned over, swiping a bag of crisps, winking at him.

"Not with that attitude you definitely won't." She opened it, settling back. "I didn't have time for lunch. I'm allowed."

He looked longingly at the coke, just out of reach. "Could I..."

"That's a terrible idea." She cut him off immediately.

"Just one?" He pleaded. She gave in surprisingly easily, slipping him a can. "You're letting me have caffeine that easily?"

"I don't have to deal with you for tonight." She replied cheekily, "But they do."

He snapped the top open, taking a long sip. "You're evil."

She hummed in agreement. "Now repeat back to me the rules."

He sat forward. "I don't know you, no real names, no alcohol, no fun."

"I don't remember the last one being but you're not wrong."

He chugged down the rest of it, wiping his mouth on his sleeve. "I'm the one working, how come you don't get to have fun either?"

"I'm the Chief Commissioner." She leaned back, emptying the last of the crisps into her mouth. "I have to have a respectable image."

He snorted, turning away, resting his head on the window, watching the streets pass by. "Boring."

She laughed. "My job is to be boring, I have to look good and do nothing."

"See I have a real job." He said smugly.

"Don't even think about it. They don't even pay you properly yet."

It wasn't a long drive, almost over before it seemed like it had started. The driver pulled the divide back, looking over her shoulder. "We're here."

Kristin drew herself up, doing one last check of her uniform. "We don't know each other; you just came to escort me." She reminded him. "And you don't know anyone who isn't in a mask, understood?"

“I know.” He grinned. “Same as last year. I don’t know nobody.”

“We don’t know nobody.” She agreed.

The car slowed, following a small line of vehicles. They were funneled through a corridor of police officers, holding people back on either side. Some were dressed up like heroes, a man in a cheap Blaze hoodie waving a sign, someone holding up a child dressed in a fake suit of armour like the Warden’s, some were holding pictures of celebrities, or clutching phones, videoing the cars going by, there were all kinds. Tommy shrunk down a little, even though they couldn’t see him, suddenly uncomfortable in the centre of all the attention.

Then they were free, passing the barricade holding the crowd back. City Hall becoming visible in front of them. It was a vast white stone structure, a large domed building in the centre, two wings on either side, one of the last remnants of the old city. A long plaza led up to it, lined with trees and water features, lit up from beneath with bright white lights. There was a wide flight of stairs up to the entrance, normally used to hold speeches and the like but this time there was a small gathering of heroes on it, greeting all manner of celebrities and politicians and the like.

The crowds lined the end of the plaza, held back by police and barriers, far enough away that they didn’t interfere but still a wall of noise echoing up the street. They drew up to the bottom of the stairs and Theseus hopped out, holding it open.

“We don’t know nobody.” He whispered. Kristin winked at him, stepping out gracefully. Paparazzi cameras flashed in their faces immediately, film crews lining the stairs up, more red tape holding them back. It was intense, shouting from all sides, most disappearing in the sheer volume of voices. Tommy grinned, waving at a few of the cameras, leading the way up. Most were focused on Kristin, she was doing her best to ignore them, soldiering on up the stairs.

“Commissioner what are your thoughts on the new wave of disappearances!”

Another flash, another yell. “Commissioner! Look over here please!”

“Commissioner Walters, how do you feel about the apparent takeover of the police force’s traditional role by the Enforcers, could you answer some questions for us.” A man appeared from nowhere, jamming a microphone up in her face. She backed away carefully, shaking her head.

“I’m not answering questions right now, thank you.”

“Commissioner!” Tsunami trotted down the stairs to meet them, wearing a formal dark blue cape with her suit that spread out behind her as she walked, stepping to Kristin’s right, neatly cutting off any further attempts to grab her attention.

“I’m here too.” Theseus piped up. Niki ignored him, leading them away from the cameras.

“Thank goodness you’re here.”

“It’s good to see you.” Kristin lowered her voice a little. “Has the president arrived yet?”

Niki’s expression faltered a little, before smoothing into an unreadable mask. “He’ll be...late.”

“Of course, he will,” Tommy muttered. He got two warning looks, and promptly shut up. Tsunami hurried them inside, away from the cameras as quickly as possible.

“Sorry about that.” She said once they’d gotten to the safety of the lobby. “They’re a little intense at the moment, most are sticking to the script the Enforcers have given them but one or two are feeling bold.”

“Isn’t that a good thing?” Tommy asked.

“Not for them it’s not. I hope the car ride wasn’t a problem. We’ve got some impressive crowds this year.”

“My officers have it under control.” She promised. “We prepared for this.”

Tsunami led them up a sweeping set of stairs, carpeted in red, looking troubled. “It’s making me uncomfortable.” She admitted. “Makes security harder, but we have a couple of night shift heroes patrolling to help.”

“See,” Kristin said reassuringly. “It’ll be fine, we’re in good hands.” Niki gave her a grateful smile.

“There hasn’t been anything from...you know.”

Niki shook her head. “Nothing. The Syndicate has been quiet for weeks.”

“That should make me feel better but it’s really not.” They shared an understanding look.

“They wouldn’t strike here anyway,” Niki said firmly. “Attacking an event is too dangerous, even they know to draw that line.”

“They’re literally terrorists, I don’t think they do.”

“I meant more in the sense of risk to their own lives, but you’re not wrong.” Niki glanced around warily, and they both fell silent, suddenly conscious of those around them as they arrived at the top of the stairs, walking into the ballroom.

The ballroom was tucked right under the domed roof, a chandelier hanging in the centre, the walls tastefully draped in more red and gold, tables around the edge crammed with elaborate displays of food and drink, many of which didn’t even look like they were supposed to be eaten at all. There was a beautiful view out over the plaza, and the city beyond, a rooftop garden on either side. It was already half-filled with all manner of people, and wherever he looked every possible symbol of social status looked back at him.

Diamonds that looked like they could feed a family for a year flashed on necks and wrists, mixed with hand-tailored suits and sheer ballgowns with tiny clutch bags, an almost sickening amount of wealth and power on full display, waiters drifting in between the crowds, holding platters of canapes and flutes of champagne. Kristin looked around slowly, admiring it all. “You’ve outdone yourself.”

Tsunami beamed with pride. “Well, I can’t really take the credit.”

“I don’t believe you didn’t have anything to do with it.”

She shrugged, non-committal. “Well actually the Captain did most of the decorations, and Supreme organised all the catering, if I’m honest, but thank you.”

“She’s lying.” The Captain appeared behind them. “I’d have lost my mind if it wasn’t for her.” She turned to Kristin. “I heard my name?”

She clasped Puffy’s hand warmly. “Nice to see you again. I hope Theseus hasn’t been giving you any trouble.”

The Captain’s eyes sparkled. “Well. Boys will be boys.”

“You’re ratting on me,” Tommy complained. “I don’t like this one bit.”

“I haven’t actually ratted you out on anything, yet.”

“Hi Theseus!” A loud voice called out behind them. Tommy turned to see Spark running over, ignoring Blaze’s calls to slow down.

“Hey Eryn.”

Spark skidded to a halt next to him, pulling a face. “Oh my god, no names, I can’t fucking believe this.” Tommy rolled his eyes.

“You literally don’t wear a mask, and neither does Blaze.” Eryn stuffed a sandwich in his mouth that he’d clearly just stolen off a table as he went past.

“Yeah, that’s cos we’re cool.”

“Debatable.” He looked at his friend suspiciously. “Are you stealing shit again? Didn’t Blaze make you promise not to do illegal stuff anymore?”

He held up a hand. “One, it’s a sandwich, it’s not illegal to steal. Two, I didn’t say I wasn’t going to do illegal shit. Just that I wasn’t going to get caught.” He glanced around quickly to make sure no one had heard. “That’s a joke, that was a joke.” He addressed the general air around him. “I did not mean any of what I just said, rich people please give us money.” He pushed another piece of sandwich into his mouth, chewing loudly. “This is great.”

“Are you kidding me? This is awful.”

“Oh no, you got me all wrong,” Spark told him smugly. “I hate the people but I’m not here for the people. I’m here to cause problems.” He drifted back towards the food table. “Stand guard for me?”

Tommy grinned, dropping back, keeping an eye out for any of their mentors as Spark set to work, little bits and pieces of food disappearing here and there up the sleeve of his hoodie. There was a sudden commotion by the entrance, and Tommy’s eyes widened. “Uh oh.” He grabbed Spark’s sleeve, dragging him back into the crowd.

“Oi! I was busy.”

“Trust me.” The entrance cleared, a pathway rapidly forming as an entourage of bodyguards swept in, followed by a figure he’d seen hundreds of times, on posters, on news bulletins, on angry protest signs, he was everywhere, his appearance as notorious as his position. The President himself wasn’t tall, but he had a presence, a cold intensity in his expression, his beard trimmed into distinctive mutton chops, wearing a simple black suit, sweeping into the room with the air of a man who expected to be the centre of attention, and was given it without question.

Kristin took a deep breath. “Wish me luck.” She walked over, clasping her hands behind her back. “Mr President?”

“Good evening Commissioner.” His voice was icy. “I trust your officers have the crowds handled. They seemed rather out of control when I arrived.” The conversation was casual enough, but with an underlying note that left anything just a little threatening. Everyone was suddenly a little on edge, one eye on him at all times, like a grenade had entered the building, with a short fuse to match. A waiter offered him a glass from a tray, and he waited until everyone around him had taken a sip from theirs before drinking, eyes sharp, almost dangerously alert.

“If you wouldn’t mind.” The Warden asked politely. The president didn’t acknowledge him directly, stepping up onto the stage, raising a glass, and silence fell almost instantly, the crowd turning to give him their full attention.

“A toast to Hero Headquarters, and everything they do to keep this city safe. And a warm welcome to the sponsors that make it all happen.” He took a sip of his glass. “May you all have a charming evening.” Short, abrupt, over and done with. He moved away as quickly as he came, and the spell was broken. The chatter began again, and the small band in the corner began to play, soft piano and violin drifting over the room.

“Stay away from him.” Tsunami said to both of them quietly. “Don’t make it obvious you’re avoiding him but just keep your distance.”

“Why?” Spark asked stubbornly.

“Why? It’s Schlatt.” She gave him an odd look.

“He doesn’t like us. He’ll try and corner you, you’ll probably become the subject of all his jokes to whoever he’s talking to, and then he gets drunk, and he gets dangerous.” Tommy explained. “It happened to me last year, it’s not fun.”

“Your life is basically in his hands.” Tsunami said quietly. “If he tells the Warden to have you taken off the program because you looked at him the wrong way, you’ll be off the program, and blacklisted from every other government job in the city while he’s at it. The later it gets in the night, the more you avoid him. And if he does speak to you, you stay polite, no matter the cost.” She kept looking over her shoulder anxiously. “I know you both like to run your mouth, this is not the time for that.”

“But what if...”

“Spark.” Blaze appeared next to them. “You heard her.” Spark promptly shut up, without another word. “You were here last year, you know the drill.” He pushed Eryn lightly off towards a group of people. “Go find some people, talk to them, stick to small talk only, don’t mess it up, make us look good.”

“Same goes for you Theseus. We’re not here to have fun, I’m afraid.” Tsunami said apologetically

“Never are.” He grumbled

“Wait, come with me.” Eryn grabbed his wrist, dragging him across the floor, over to an odd pair off at the side. They stood out straight away, in no small part because one was a hybrid, and a rare one at

that, his skin an inky black, two small horns curling up on either side of his head, his eyes almost completely white, even the iris. The man next to him was human, but still quite unusual, in a dove blue suit, wearing an almost obscene amount of jewellery, silver rings on every one of his fingers.

"I don't think you've met my dad. This is Bad, and this is his friend Skeppy." He waved his hands in Tommy's general direction. "This is Theseus."

Bad waved at him with a friendly smile. "Hi. We've heard a lot about you."

"Hi." He said awkwardly. "Cool name."

Bad lit up. "Thank you. It's not my actual name but that's very boring so I prefer Bad."

Blaze leaned over Spark's shoulder, having followed them over, glaring at him. "You're cheating. I told you to go talk to people."

"I am talking to people."

"You know what I meant."

"Dad he's being mean." Eryn groaned. Bad patted him on the shoulder sympathetically.

"It's alright, don't let me interrupt your work. I'll talk to you later."

"You're supposed to be on his side," Skeppy informed him. Tommy hovered for a minute, half wanting to stay, intrigued, but Spark was already tugging him away.

"You didn't tell me your dad was a hybrid." He muttered once they'd got some distance from them. Spark adjusted his headband, pushing his hair out of his eyes.

"Does it matter?"

"Yes it matters." He hissed. "How many hybrids have you seen his age. Or, you know, are here. You see any other hybrids in here?"

Eryn looked around to try and prove him wrong, to no avail. "Well, Skeppy is a jeweller, a really well-known one, so he has a lot of money, hence he got the invite and bought my dad as a plus 1." He looked a bit awkward. "But to be fair dad used to be a lawyer and he's donated as well, they just didn't directly invite him."

"I can't believe you lied to me." He complained. "You made me pay for your lunch the other week saying you were broke."

"You're the Chief Commissioners' son stop whining," Eryn said, already distracted

"Adopted." He corrected, "And keep that down, some of us don't have public identities."

Spark sniggered. "You think I'm not adopted? I only have a dad, how do you think that works."

"Well I don't know, I didn't know anything about your family other than Blaze cos you always said you grew up together." Tommy retorted. "Don't expect me to know."

"Well yeah, Blaze raised me." He explained. "We only met Dad like two years ago because HQ said I wasn't getting adequate childcare with him working all the time or some bullshit, but they're nice

enough.” He leaned back, cracking his knuckles. “I guess we need to go talk old people out of their pensions then.”

He turned to a small group standing nearby, chatting to them confidently, and Tommy tried to join him, only to be cornered by an older couple, who started to bombard him with questions about training. He tried to answer them as politely as he could, having to bite on his tongue more than a few times to stop a retort letting slip.

Faces started to go by in a blur. The last of the evening light faded outside, and staff lit candles out on the rooftop gardens, the conversation beginning to rise a little as the champagne began to flow more easily. He finally made his escape from a slightly creepy banker with a muttered excuse about having to find his mentor, managing to find her near one of the food tables, with a circle of other older heroes.

“Theseus! There you are.” She waved him over. “I haven’t seen you for a bit.”

“Got caught up.” He joined them, glaring at the cyborg standing next to her. “Hello Android.”

“Hello Theseus.” He adjusted his glasses, one lens red and one blue to match his eyes. “What’s got you so worked up.”

“Jack can we please not.” Tsunami hissed. “I don’t need you two arguing right now.”

“Lovely speech from the President.” Android remarked, studying the champagne in his hand pointedly.

“He always keeps it short, it’s not like he’s got anything good to say about us.” Niki said quietly.

“You can’t just say that.” Android chided her

“In all fairness,” Puffy admitted. “Even I’ll admit that’s not news.”

“He could be worse?” Jack argued, not very convincingly. “He might not be that bad in person.”

“I had the dubious pleasure of being his bodyguard for two years, I think I’d know.” Niki smoothed out her cape. “Theseus I think Commissioner Walters was looking for you.”

Kristin was deep in conversation with a man in a dark green suit a little way away, black tie clearly made out of some sort of silk, the watch on his wrist probably costing more than Theseus’s entire yearly salary. It all screamed money, although more muted than some of the flashy displays of wealth, relatively simple and restrained. Long straw blonde hair was caught back in a low ponytail, a gold earring hanging off one ear, holding what looked to be a real emerald. Tommy made a beeline for her, brushing off any attempts at conversation with a polite nod or quick greeting, popping up next to her elbow.

“Commissioner.” He said brightly

She jumped a little, startled by his sudden appearance. “Hello Theseus.”

“Tsunami said you were looking for me?”

“Oh, I was just wondering where you’d gone, I couldn’t see you anywhere.” She followed his enquiring look towards the man she was speaking to. “I’d like you to meet Phil Craft.”

Chapter End Notes

Oh look it's Dadza, where did he come from. Also I wasn't going to include Bad and Skeppy, hence they're not in the characters, but I thought it would be funny. If you saw proofreading errors, no you didn't, I was very tired when I posted, this, I'll check it over later.

Any comments are always very welcome!

Chapter 4

Chapter Summary

“Dickhead.” The other boy’s blank face cracked a little, a slight smile peeking through.

“If you say so.”

“What’s your name?” He asked. “Seeing as I told you mine.”

He paused, tilting his head as if thinking about it. “Tubbo.”

“Weird name.” Tubbo opened his mouth, ready to go on the defense, then smirked. “Alright Theseus, keep talking.”

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

“Hullo.” Tommy hooked his thumbs into his belt, trying to look casual. Kristin held in a tight smile.

“He’s an architect.” She explained. “We were just talking about an urban renewal project they’re planning in District 13 and 14, I believe it’s on a patrol route you used to do.”

“Exciting.” He tried to make his voice sound less monotone and failed spectacularly

Phil laughed quietly. “It’s really not, but I’m glad you think so.” He turned to catch the attention of a boy in a yellow suit hovering behind him, around Tommy’s age or perhaps a little younger.

“Chayanne?” The boy glanced around Phil, nervous by the sudden group of people. He had a shaggy mess of blonde hair that spilled over his eyes, and a slightly lopsided smile, waving at Tommy.

“Hi.” Tommy waved back, not really knowing what else to do.

“This is my son, Chayanne.” Phil introduced him. “He works with me, it’s a family business.”

“Nice to meet you.” Tommy said awkwardly. He held out his hand, and Chayanne shook it. “So, you’re sponsors?”

“Actually, we’ve never actually donated to the tower.” Phil replied, amused. “But they’re hoping we will, so they invite us to these events.”

“They must like you then,” Kristin remarked. “They make it so hard to get in.”

“They like our money.” He corrected. “And Chayanne likes the free food. Speaking of which.” His son had already wandered off, his eyes lit up, zeroed in on a waiter nearby with a fresh plate of canapés. Phil watched him go with a slight smile. “I can’t take them anywhere,” He said despairingly. “Chayanne won’t stop interrogating the caterers on how they made everything, and I haven’t a clue where his brother’s gone.”

Tommy just shrugged awkwardly. “I think Spark keeps stealing the snacks so he’s gotta hurry.”

“So, how are you liking all of this.” Phil turned to him. He must have seen the instant disdain before the younger could hide it. “You can answer however you like, I don’t mind. I don’t like formal events much either.”

“Too many people,” Tommy said bluntly. “Too much small talk.”

Kristin covered her mouth with her hand delicately. “Theseus, you can’t say things like that.” He just grunted. “Go get some fresh air.” She suggested. “Out in the garden is nice, less people.”

Chayanne stuck his head back around, cheeks full of snacks and more in his hands, a wide grin on his face. Phil ruffled his hair fondly, leaning down to whisper something in his ear.

Tommy didn’t need any more of an excuse, stepping out into the cool night air, drawing a deep breath. There was a fresh breeze starting to blow, and while the sky was clear now the dark shadows of clouds hung on the horizon.

He wandered further out onto the rooftop. Most of the guests were close to the doors, where the food and people were, so it got quieter the further away he went, walking past benches and flower beds towards the end of the garden.

He turned a corner behind a tall hedge and then stopped. A boy around his age was sat by one of the planters, curled up against it, his suit crumpled. A beanie lay scrunched up in his hand, he was staring at it angrily, as if it had done something to personally offend him.

There was an odd lump on his head, two. Horns, barely more than nubs on his skull, just starting to form into a point, and his ears, no doubt normally covered by the beanie were a little longer than a normal human’s.

“Are you alright?” He seemed oddly familiar, but Tommy couldn’t quite place it. The boy sat up, spinning around, yanking his beanie back on, glaring at him.

“What the hell! You can’t sneak up on a guy like that.”

“I-”

“You didn’t see that.” The boy said angrily. “You didn’t see shit.”

“You’re a hybrid? So?” Tommy spread his arms. “I’m a meta?”

“Alright, no need to say it so loudly.” The boy pulled his hat further down. “Let the whole party hear.”

“Right. Secret, got it.” The boy looked at him suspiciously. “Don’t blame you, the company here is shit.” That earned him a soft snigger

“Don’t need to tell me twice.” He settled back down again, though his beanie was firmly pulled down this time.

“What’re you doing out here,” Tommy asked bluntly.

“I don’t know. Escaping the bullshit in there.” He sat back against the planter, looking exhausted. Tommy grinned.

“I like you.”

“Great. Because I have no clue who you are.”

“I’m Theseus.” He held a hand out to help him up. The boy’s expression brightened a little.

“Oh, you’re Tsunami’s apprentice?”

“I mean I hoped you’d know me just from my own amazing crazy heroic deeds but sure, I’m Tsunami’s apprentice,” Tommy complained, mostly joking.

“You’re full of yourself aren’t you.” The boy said, taking his hand, and Tommy pulled him to his feet.

“Yeah, because it’s funny.” He retorted, earning him an odd look.

“If you say so.”

“Dickhead.” The other boy’s blank face cracked a little, a slight smile peeking through.

“If you say so.”

“What’s your name?” He asked. “Seeing as I told you mine.” The boy paused, tilting his head as if thinking about it.

“Tubbo.”

“Weird name.” Tubbo opened his mouth, ready to go on the defense, then smirked. “Alright Theseus, keep talking.” Tommy stuck his tongue out at him, feeling surprisingly at ease, a feeling justified when he got a response in kind. Tubbo wandered over to the edge of the balcony, looking thoughtful. “You know a bullet would go right through this.”

“Why is that the first thing that comes to mind?”

He shrugged. “I don’t know. Paranoia?”

“Let’s just not think about that.” Tommy joined him, looking down at the plaza below. A few policemen were patrolling the building, flashlights out in the dark, completely oblivious to the boys watching them. He swung his leg back and forth restlessly, kicking a piece of gravel through the gap at the bottom of the railings, watching as it flew out, falling to the floor far below with a faint clatter. Tubbo watched in, unblinking.

“Ten points if you hit a policeman.” He leaned his head on his arms tiredly. It fell just short, and the policeman looked up. Tubbo grabbed his arm, pulling them both down behind the planter, away from the edge so he couldn’t see them. There was a pause, looking at each other, and then they broke into quiet laughter.

“I nearly had him,” Tommy whispered. “Let me try again, I’ll get him this time.”

Tubbo grinned. “Thirty points for an Enforcer.”

“Fifty.”

“Thirty cos you get the added satisfaction of hitting the assholes.” He countered.

“Are you bargaining down the price of hitting a policeman with a pebble?” Tommy asked, bewildered.

“You started it,” Tubbo said smugly. “And no, an Enforcer, it’s different. One’s shit and does nothing, and one does something that’s shit.”

“You can’t say that.” Tommy protested

“Why not.” He said boldly. “Who’s going to stop me?”

Tommy looked around, as if expecting an adult to come out of the bushes and tell him off. “Fair enough.”

They stood in awkward silence for a little while, neither knowing what to say, watching the guards patrol back and forth, kicking gravel from time to time, none that landed anywhere close, not that they were really trying.

“Good talk,” Tommy said finally, drawing a laugh out of his companion. “I should go back.” He added glumly. “Or the Warden will get mad.”

Tubbo’s face fell, but he covered it quickly, turning away as if he wasn’t interested. “Alright.”

“I’ll come back outside in a bit.” He offered. “I just need to make them think I’m doing my job.”

“Fine. See you in a bit.”

“See you in a bit.” He started to walk back, pulling his cloak around him, only to stop mid-step. The president was staring out over the gardens from inside a window, face already reddened from the drinking that he clearly hadn’t been holding back on. He seemed to be looking straight at the two of them, even half in darkness, his gaze burrowing into Tommy’s skin.

They stood there for a few seconds, staring back at each other, until someone leaned over, saying something to him. He moved away from the window, but the feeling of being watched didn’t leave for some reason, the icy stare lingering. Tommy shivered, the hair on the back of his neck rising, feeling cold all of a sudden. He sped up, brushing it off as too long outside, ducking in the door.

Kristin was still deep in conversation with the same rich guy, about that project in District 12 that couldn’t have been half as interesting as they made it out to be. Chayanne was listening attentively, eating snacks out of his pockets, clearly having stocked up. Tommy moved a little closer to try and eavesdrop when another man joined them in a red suit, familiar pink hair in a plait.

Tommy inhaled sharply, biting down on his tongue as Techno walked up to Kristin, shaking her hand. He looked much smarter now, his leather jacket traded for a fine red suit and tie with a black silk waistcoat, a gold watch on his wrist.

Though, for all the finery he looked out of his depth, keeping his head down, staying close to Chayanne, who Tommy assumed must have been the brother he bought the atlas for. Chayanne seemed a little more self assured, inquisitive and curious, simply watching the ball go by.

Kristin must have noticed his sudden discomfort, hovering at a distance as she excused herself quietly, pulling him aside a little. “What is it?”

“Don’t know nobody.” She understood immediately.

“Who?” He nodded towards Techno. She blinked in surprise but just nodded. “Don’t worry about it. I’ll just do the talking.” She turned back to the group, giving Techno a bright smile. “Sorry about that. You must be Technoblade.”

“Techno.” He rumbled. “No one really calls me Technoblade.” Techno glanced over to Tommy. “And you’re Theseus, right?”

“Uh, yeah.” Tommy managed, a little taken off guard.

“Good name,” Techno said, seeming just as uncomfortable with the small talk as Tommy was. “Greek mythology or just a cool name?”

“Kinda? Just thought it sounded cool.”

“Fair enough.” He turned away again, and Tommy stared at the floor, bored.

“You alright?” He looked up to see Phil frowning slightly. “You look tired.” He said, and then lowered his voice. “Maybe you should head back.”

Tommy looked at him, surprised. “I’m sorry?”

“You look tired.” Phil repeated. “If I know anything about this place they’ve got all the younger metas working overtime, no one will notice if you and the other kids slip out.”

“Why do you care?” He jumped to the defence automatically and then winced. “Sorry.”

“Chayanne and Techno are probably heading out soon as well.” He added casually. “Thought you might be too.” He gave a meaningful look up, and Tommy followed it to see a familiar mutton-chopped figure with a nearly drained glass of alcohol slowly angling through the crowd towards them, face increasingly reddened. He nodded slowly, finally understanding.

“Yeah, I’m feeling pretty tired actually, now you mention it.” He nudged Kristin. “He’s coming over here.” She glanced up quickly, spotting the president, before catching someone else’s eye across the hall to warn them too.

“Why don’t we go get some air?” Phil suggested suddenly, holding his arm out to Kristin. “It’s kind of stuffy in here.”

“That would be nice.” Kristin took the opening, the two of them making a dignified escape, a few others around them quickly finding reasons to be somewhere else. Techno and Chayanne lingered for a moment, as if looking to see what Tommy was going to do.

“Your family are so concerned for other people’s health,” Tommy muttered.

“Of course.” Techno held his hand out, his little brother wordlessly placing a small tartlet of some kind in it. “Why wouldn’t we be.” He took a bite out of the tartlet, dropped his voice. “He hasn’t taken his eye off you since you came in. You should probably find somewhere else to be pretty quick.”

“Thanks.”

A hand settled on his shoulder, Tsunami joining them. “My apologies. Do you mind if I borrow my student?”

“Of course.” Techno nodded to Tommy, turning back to his family, trailing them out into the garden.

“He’s right, it’s probably about time for you to head out.” She said quietly. “Go round the others up, I’ll head him off.”

“The Warden won’t get mad?”

“Not if he doesn’t want the diplomatic incident of you or Spark mouthing off a drunk president he won’t.” Tommy shuddered at the thought.

“Not him. I can talk shit but he’d kill me.” She glanced over her shoulder. The president was clearly heading towards them now, his voice getting louder over the crowd.

“I’ll see you Monday, alright? Take care getting home, text me and your mum when you’re back.”

“Will do.” He headed over to one of the tables, feeling unnerved, glancing over his shoulder. He swiped a few fancy chocolates before he left, slipping them into a pouch on his belt, tapping Purpled’s shoulder as he went past. “Meet me by the stairs. Tsunami says we can leave.”

Purpled nodded once, turning back to his conversation, and Tommy began to wind through the crowd slowly, not making it obvious he was heading out, trying to throw Schlatt off his tail. Luckily he seemed to have been distracted, his attention turned on elsewhere.

A burst of ugly laughter broke out behind him, and he winced, stealing a look back. Tsunami had just narrowly avoided a glass of wine over her, a circle of old politicians surrounding her laughing. He felt a curl of anger in his chest, ready to turn and run over to protect his mentor but she had it more than handled, waving her hand, the wine rising off the floor and back into the glass of the man next to the president, folding her arms.

“Watch where you step, you’ll ruin good wine like that.”

Silence fell, first around her, and then spread outwards, rippling across the room. Schlatt stared at her for a few moments, the onlookers hanging in the balance, watching his face carefully for any sign of his reaction. He finally broke, his face morphing into a smile, and then breaking into amused, but almost cruel laughter.

The crowd followed suit, more relieved than anything, moments away from a famous presidential outburst. Tommy waited a few more moments to make sure she was fine, and then made his escape as quickly as he could.

Another meta was waiting outside, wearing a dark purple suit and white body armour, a mask pulled up over his nose and mouth, his hair hidden under a hooded purple cape, not one that Tommy had ever seen before.

“Who are you?” He asked abruptly.

“Void.” The tall kid said awkwardly. “Tsunami sent me down, said she was going to get Spark.”

“I didn’t see you in there.”

“I got stuck with patrol duty.” He said mournfully. “I only got to go in at the end.”

Tommy snorted. “Wow. They let me in and they don’t let literally anyone else take my place?” He began to pace back and forth impatiently. “Is Purpled actually coming?”

“Last I saw he was trying to swipe champagne from the waiters so probably not.”

“Turns out they have specific instructions not to serve me.” A voice called down the stairs. “Punz told them.” Purpled appeared, looking annoyed.

“Killjoy.” Tommy yawned, stretching.

“Ehh.” Void leaned back against the banister. “Probably a good idea.”

“Awww, teacher’s pet.” Purpled mocked him. “Who are you anyway?”

“Why is everyone asking me that? I’ve been here for weeks.” Void protested weakly. Tommy ignored him.

“Where’s Spark? Is he coming?”

“He’ll go home with his brother,” Purpled said, bored. “And Blaze’ll probably be here for a bit.”

“Nah I’m here.” Spark appeared behind Purpled. He narrowed his eyes at Void for a moment. “Oh, you’re the night shift kid.”

“Finally, someone who knows me.” Void adjusted his mask, looking a little relieved.

“Well I don’t know your name.” Eryn retorted. “So don’t get ahead of yourself here.”

“He’s called Void.” Tommy reported. “Or so he says.”

“Shit name,” Eryn said smugly. Void held his hands up defensively

“Didn’t choose it, don’t blame me.”

There were a few seconds of silence. “Sooooo, you’re on that shift,” Purpled said finally. Void gave him a thumbs up.

“It’s as bad as they say.”

“Heard you got fired at by Enforcers the other week. That’s rough buddy,” Eryn said casually.

“Yeah that’s a big L,” Purpled added. “Can’t help you with that.”

“Imagine patrolling instead of talking to old rich people.” Tommy joined. “Must suck.”

“The crowds are wild out there man.” Void protested. “It’s not fun.”

“Anyway.” Tommy hopped down another step. “Tsunami said that…”

“That we can leave early. I heard.” Purpled swept past them. “I’m out, see ya losers.” Void watched him go, taken aback.

“Is he always like that?”

“Pretty much.” Eryn took a sip from his glass. “I’m just going to go steal some more food and then I’ll be there.” He disappeared back into the ballroom and Void headed over to a small side door, holding it open.

“You coming?” Tommy jumped down the stairs, taking them two at a time, ducking through. The paparazzi outside had mostly cleared, waiting until the end of the ball to get more photos, and either way, neither of them were of much interest, especially not Void, so those that were still waiting mainly paid them no mind.

“We should wait for Spark.” Tommy stopped, turning around. “He’ll get annoyed if we don’t.” Void looked back over his shoulder.

“Do we have to?” He asked cautiously

“I mean you don’t,” Tommy said. “You can go if you want, you don’t have to wait.”

Void shrugged. “The longer I stay here the less actual patrolling I have to do tonight.”

“They didn’t take you off patrol for working here?”

The other meta snorted. “No. I got work as usual once this is done.”

Tommy sniggered, without a shred of sympathy. “Man, sucks to suck.”

“Hey! I don’t suck.” He paused for a moment. “You know, you’re very annoying for someone I’ve just met.”

“That’s me,” Tommy said absentmindedly, pacing back and forth.

There was a dull thud from somewhere in the distance, and then again. Tommy glanced back, concerned. “Did you hear that?”

“The door?” Void wasn’t paying any attention, checking something on his phone

“That wasn’t a door.” An odd gut feeling settled in his stomach, and he was about to say something more, but he never got the words out of his mouth

A sudden, concussive explosion rocked the plaza, echoing through the air, and for a moment time hung in the balance. His blood rushed in his ears, pulling his arm up in front of his face in a vain attempt to protect himself. Then it sped up again, glass shattering as the world erupted in fire and white light.

Chapter End Notes

Oops, my hand slipped. Anyway, that’s most of our cast introduced, so let the games begin.

I'm updating daily at the moment, I don't know how long I can keep this up but I just want to get the base of the story in place. After that updates will slow a little but they'll stay pretty regular, I have most of the plot of this fic worked out already, I just need to fill in the gaps.

And the walls came tumbling down (in the city that we loved)

Chapter Summary

“There’s no more time!” He ran forward, throwing his hands up. Red light wrapped around it, yanking what was left together with everything he had, holding it in place.

“Android is there anyone left.” The Captain asked urgently. The cyborg turned slowly, mechanical eye glowing, scanning the building.

“Three heat signatures.” He turned slowly, pointing in their directions. “43 feet away, 31 feet, and 37 feet away.”

Tommy gritted his teeth. A headache was starting to build behind his eyes, pounding in his skull. He slid down to one knee, sweat beading on his forehead, the heat starting to burn against his skin. “Hurry!”

Chapter Notes

Title is from Pompeii by Bastille

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

He didn’t even get time to think. Arms wrapped around him, lifting him up, and his stomach dropped out from underneath him as they lurched forward. They were suddenly twenty feet away on the plaza, and the arm threw him to the ground as flames surged from the hall, billowing out from the ballroom inside. He stared at the place on the stairs he’d been stood moments before as the screaming began, shattering the haze.

“Kristin!” The cry broke from his throat without thinking and he lurched forward. A hand grabbed his arm, holding him back, and he tried to yank it away, but it held firm.

“Don’t rush in. There might be more.” Void tightened his grip.

“I need to.” He begged. “I need to, let me go!”

Void shook his head. “There could be more explosives. It’s not safe.”

“Let me go!” He tried to wrestle himself free but the other meta was stronger than he looked. Tommy stared at him. “What the hell. I need to get up there.” He tried to pull his arm away again. “My mum is in there!”

Void blinked. “Oh. Well. I’m sorry, but we need clearance, we have to follow procedure.”

“Fuck procedure!”

“No can do.” He grabbed Tommy’s other shoulder. “Get it together, we’re working, there’s no time for that. Get your head on the job.”

Tommy swore loudly but managed to pull himself together, grabbing his earpiece off his belt, putting it on, tapping it. "Theseus online."

The Warden's voice cut in. "Where are you?"

"Outside, with Void, we were about to leave. Permission to come up?"

"Negative, do not move." He ordered. "Android is scanning for any other devices."

"Please." He begged.

"I said do not move, situation is not critical." Came the cold reply. "The roof is holding, wait until we know it's clear."

There was a heart-stopping silence, that in reality lasted ten seconds at most but felt so much longer. "No further devices detected." Android relayed. Void didn't wait for further instructions, phasing them both straight up onto into the ballroom.

The decorations were on fire, the room filled with smoke, the ground treacherous with rubble and broken glass. Any tables had been flung over, smashed food and plates across the floor and walls. The chandelier had collapsed, but by some odd miracle the explosion had almost completely cleared the area where it had fallen, leaving a pile of twisted metal. People were running back and forth blindly, trampling across each other in their haste to leave. Across from them, half-hidden behind a haze of dust, a blue armoured figure was picking herself up from where she'd been thrown against a wall, looking around at the wreckage.

"Tsunami!" He ducked under a collapsed pillar, running over to her. She was checking herself for injuries, dusting herself off. "Are you alright?"

She nodded, a little shaken, but unharmed, beyond a few scratches across her cheek from some kind of flying debris. "Not too bad. Blaze and Spark were able to absorb most of the explosion, and what they didn't get they managed to channel away from the guests."

"Where's Kristin?"

"I don't know, but you can't focus on her right now." Tsunami said, not unkindly. "We need to make sure everyone is out safe, and that will include her, alright?"

Void looked around awkwardly, rubbing his arm uncomfortably. "Wow. This is bad"

"You." The Warden strode over also unharmed and unshaken, as calm as ever, which was somehow reassuring, pointing to Void. "The President is outside, get him down first, and any important officials after, they're our priority."

The other meta saluted, vanishing out the door, and Tommy looked around. "Where's Spark?"

"Outside trying to get a better look at the fire." Eryn's voice came in, a little strained. "It's spreading but I've got it under control for now."

"Get everyone out now!"

"The stairs are blocked." Foxtrot reported. "I can't get people down."

“Theseus sort it out.” The Warden ordered. “Android get me a proper report of structural damage, Captain, organise the evacuation, Spark, keep me updated on the fire.”

“Yes sir!”

He looked left and right, searching for Kristin in the faces of those going past, but there was no sign of her, and he couldn’t stop to look. The doors to the ballroom lay flat on the floor, torn right off their hinges. A section of the ceiling had collapsed in across the top, crushing the banisters like matchsticks, letting in the moonlight. Tommy reached out, red light spreading across the concrete slab.

“Don’t try and lift it, it’s too heavy.” Tsunami advised. “Just push it. We just need a way down, as wide as you can manage but don’t stress about it.”

He nodded, concentrating, and then shoving his hands forward. The slab cracked in two, skidding to the side, opening up a path down the centre. Foxtrot nodded appreciatively, turning, putting his hands to his mouth

“Everyone who is able to walk, please leave by the stairway!” Guests began to stream past, most still on their feet, one or two still clutching their glasses or purses. They were pushing and shoving, trying to get out as quickly as they could,

“Please leave in an orderly fashion, rushing will only slow everyone down!” A few slowed, but most barely even looked back, it was all Foxtrot and Punz could do to try and slow them down and prevent them from crushing each other, the Captain weaving in and out, trying to break them up. The ballroom emptied rapidly, figures stumbling through the haze, scarves or handkerchiefs pushed over faces to try and protect them from the smoke.

“It’s getting worse,” Spark called out, a little desperate. “It’s spreading, I can’t hold it back.”

“Come on, it’s just a little fire.” Punz sounded annoyed. “I’ve seen you handle this before.”

“Shut the fuck up.” Blaze snapped right back. “You try taking a bomb to the chest and see how well you function afterwards.” Dust rained down from the ceiling, crack widening.

“Boys this is not the time.” The Captain interrupted. “Either help or get out.”

The smoke was getting thicker, burning his throat. Void was bouncing in and out, disappearing and reappearing in a blue of purple sparks, taking the most injured, teleporting them down to the plaza.

“Easy.” Tsunami grabbed his wrist as he reappeared yet another time. “You’ll wear yourself out like that.”

“We can’t afford to take breaks.” The Captain said grimly. “I don’t know how long the walls will hold, and if we lose even one person in that room we’re done for.”

“Aaaand this is why I hate social events.” Punz quipped across the comms.

“Yeah, I missed my fourth grandma’s funeral for this,” Foxtrot muttered. There was a small outbreak of tense laughter. A man limped out of the room, his right sleeve missing, leaning on the wall for support. Tommy helped him down the stairs and over to the medics, taking the chance to look around.

There was no sign of Kristin among the injured, but he didn't have time to search any further, running back up. Tsunami was battling the fire with what little water there was, droplets floating around her but it wasn't doing much, the flames hissing and then surging back untouched.

Void waved him over to a young woman lying at the side. Her leg was trapped under a table and he levitated it aside carefully. The other meta took her hand, vanishing as more dust rained down, along with larger chunks of stone, chipping the floor around them.

"Structural integrity is rapidly depleting," Android reported.

"I can fucking see that." Blaze had a hand pressed to his ribs, struggling to breathe.

"Blaze evacuate now."

"I'm fine." He protested. "I got this."

The cyborg glared at him. "Don't argue with the walking x-ray, you are not fine. You need to get out."

"Blaze?" Spark ducked inside, worried. "Are you alright?"

He managed a lopsided smile for his brother. "Where's Supreme when you need them?"

"We are no longer able to prevent building collapse." The Warden relayed into his earpiece. "All agents focus on evacuation." The ground quaked again as a pillar collapsed in the stairway, right over Foxtrot's head.

"Look out!" Tommy spun, freezing it just above him, moments from crushing him underneath. "Run!" The fox hybrid's eyes widened, and he darted forward, dodging past, throwing himself down the stairs. He let the pillar go, and it slammed to the ground, shaking the floor, disturbing the settled dust. The crack on the ceiling widened further, larger and larger chunks falling.

"It's going to come down any minute!" Punz called out. "We don't have much time, how many are left!"

"I think we got most of them. I need just a little longer." Void replied, a little strained

"We don't have that kind of time."

Tommy looked up at the ceiling, squinting through the smoke. "I think I can hold it if we have to?"

"That's too dangerous." Tsunami countered immediately. "It's far too heavy."

"I'm afraid might be no other way," Android said grimly.

"Theseus stand by." The Warden ordered. "If I give the order, maintain the roof at all costs." The rift widened again, hairline fractures spreading all over it.

"Wait for it."

"There's no more time!" He ran forward, throwing his hands up. Red light wrapped around it, yanking what was left together with everything he had, holding it in place.

"Android is there anyone left." The Captain asked urgently. The cyborg turned slowly, mechanical eye glowing, scanning the building.

“Three heat signatures.” He turned slowly, pointing in their directions. “43 feet away, 31 feet, and 37 feet away.”

Tommy gritted his teeth. A headache was starting to build behind his eyes, pounding in his skull. He slid down to one knee, sweat beading on his forehead, the heat starting to burn against his skin. “Hurry!”

“I’m here.” Tsunami appeared, standing over him protectively. “I’ve got you.”

“I have one,” Punz called.

“Two.” That was Spark

“And three.” Android crossed the room, carrying someone in his arms, disappearing through the doorway.

His vision began to grey, head spinning, the silence over the radio dragging on and on. “Hold on.” She whispered. “Just a little longer.” The heat was growing stronger, the fire now raging out of control, flames crawling across the floor towards them.

“We’re out. All heat signatures are now outside the building.” Android’s voice came in over their earpieces. “Get out of there.”

“Theseus that’s enough. Let it go!” Tommy slumped down, exhausted, and arms reached out, catching him, lowering him to the ground. “Void.”

“Copy.” Arms wrapped around them both, and his stomach lurched. The heat of the fire vanished, and he managed to pry his eyes open to find himself on the plaza again, watching from below as the dome crashed down almost in slow motion, splitting into two, and then into smaller pieces.

Rubble was thrown out, spilling over the edge, flying towards the crowds below. Tsunami drew back instinctively, but it never even got that far. A wall of shimmering green light rose up from the ground in front of them, and the debris slammed into it, evaporating into dust. Another shield rose next to it, and another, running around the perimeter until the hall was encased in it, the ground shaking under their feet as the dome crumbled down.

“Well done.” Tsunami murmured as they watched it fall. “Well done Theseus, that was amazing.” He smiled lopsidedly at the praise, leaning into her, and she set him down gently. “We need to walk.”

“I’m tired.” He murmured.

“I know, but we need to move, more of the ceiling could come down, and I don’t know how long the Warden can hold that shield.”

“Everybody move back!” The Captain ran past, signalling to the police, “Get back to the barricades!”

“Can you stand?” Tsunami asked him urgently. “We need to go.”

“Not really.” He admitted.

“Lean on me.” She pulled his arm over her shoulder. “Void give me a hand.” Another arm looped around him on his other side, holding him up, almost carrying him across the ground towards the end of the plaza, lowering him down slowly to sit against a bench. He slumped down, trembling, and suddenly freezing cold, an empty pit in his stomach. “Don’t feel so good.”

“I bet. You overdid it a bit there.” She said gently.

“Where’s Kristin?” A brief pause followed.

“We’re trying to find her.”

He sat up, panicked. Tsunami pushed him back down gently. “Last I saw she was outside, she was away from the blast, there’s no reason for her to be seriously injured, I promise.”

“Is he alright?” The Captain trotted over, looking worried

“Burned out, he needs a minute.”.

“We need you on the roof, the fire is spreading.” She said apologetically. “Blaze is injured and Spark is exhausted, we’re not done yet.”

“I don’t want to leave him.” Niki protested. “He’s in a bad way.”

“I think he’s in shock.” Void added. “But I can watch him if you need to go.”

“He definitely is. Do you have anything sweet?” She asked. “That will help.” Tommy dug into his pocket, pulling out the chocolates he’d stolen just before he left.

“I was gonna save these.”

“That’ll do.” She took off her cape, wrapping it around his shoulders. “Stay here. Do not move, I’ll be back soon.”

He nodded, chewing on the chocolates slowly, and she left, following the Captain. He could vaguely see the water rising out of the fountains, gathering around her like her own personal hurricane, and then she went out of view. The fire crackled in the distance, a vague orange glow, sirens coming closer, voices talking over the earpiece but he was too tired to be able to work out what they were saying.

“You still awake?” Void asked quietly after a little while.

“Yeah.”

“When you said Kristin.” He continued. “Did you mean Commissioner Walters?”

Tommy sat up a bit. “Yeah. Why?”

“I think I see her, wait a minute.” The presence by his side was suddenly gone and he was left in the dark for a few moments, before rapid footsteps came his way.

“He’s over here.”

“Hey, hey.” Kristin’s voice was suddenly above him. “It’s alright, I’m here.”

He sunk down in relief. “You’re okay?”

“We were outside, we escaped the worst of it.” She explained. “Are you alright?”

He nodded, sitting up blearily. “Not hurt. Where did Tsunami go again?”

“She’s putting out the fire, she’ll be back soon.” Void told him

“What happened?” He asked. “What happened up there, we were leaving, we were just waiting for Spark and then it exploded, what happened?”

“We don’t know.” She said grimly. “I mean we can take a guess at who could have been behind it but as of right now we don’t officially know what happened.”

He ran his hand through his hair, processing what he was hearing. “Is anyone injured?”

“Nothing serious, we got very lucky. But for attacking a party of heroes they caused a considerable amount of damage.” She said grimly. “As you’ve probably seen.”

“Anyone we know?”

“Blaze and Spark were caught right underneath it, they managed to absorb most of the blast, so no one else has serious injuries, but they’ll need a night in hospital most likely. Was there anyone else you knew there? We’re getting a list together.”

He blinked, slowly regaining some coherency. “Did Tubbo get out okay?”

“Tubbo?” Kristin said doubtfully. “I don’t recognise the name but I can check.” There was a pause, and distant voices. “One of the staff is just looking.” She relayed.

There was a long silence, and what sounded like a short argument, before she came back.

“Did you find anything?”

“There was no one called Tubbo invited.” She said finally. “I’m sorry.”

“But I met him, on the rooftop.” Tommy argued. “I swear, he was there, in a suit and all.”

She sat down next to him, shaking her head. “There’s no Tubbo on the guest list, or the staff, or anything close to it.”

“We should look into that.” A man’s voice said from nearby. “If someone managed to sneak in, they may be responsible for the explosion.”

Kristin rose to her feet. “Your people were in charge of security.”

“Your officers were in charge of sweeping the building beforehand.” He said coldly

“And our sweeps came up negative.” Kristin retorted. “So whatever it was, it got into the building under your watch.”

“Be careful Commissioner.” The unfamiliar voice warned her. “You’re overstepping your bounds.”

“I think now would be a good time for you to leave.” The Captain told them both quietly. “We’ll take it from here.”

“Can you tell me…” Tommy began.

“I’ll keep you updated on Spark and the others.” She promised, already knowing what he was going to ask. “And well done, both of you. You did us proud tonight.”

“I agree.” The Warden appeared next to her, trident in one hand, giving them a rare nod of approval.
“Get some rest, you’ve earned it.”

His eyes were closing, and he couldn’t stop them, head falling onto his shoulder as the adrenaline rush faded. Someone picked him up, and he was too tired to even protest, giving in to the exhaustion as City Hall fell behind him.

Chapter End Notes

Yeah so Blaze and Spark can control fire/heat, The Warden can summon indestructible shields, Tommy is a telekinetic, The Captain and Foxtrot are both just hybrids, though the Captain is very strong and Foxtrot is fast and has exceptional hearing, Punz has superhuman reflexes, Void can teleport, Tsunami can control water, and Android is just a robot, well, 50% a robot. Fun fact I hadn’t even decided fully on the Warden’s until the roof started collapsing and I went, yeah, that sounds perfect actually, which is particularly funny considering I have nearly 50k of this fic written out including the ending and in all that time hadn’t decided on his powers yet.

I like this chapter, I think it’s my favourite yet, but if you see any editing mistakes, no you didn’t ;)

All around me are familiar faces

Chapter Summary

Another photo flashed up on the screen, a grainy CCTV image of a man in a dark hooded trenchcoat and white opera mask in an alleyway, another next to him in black body armour, a bleached boars skull covering his face, a double-handed sword slung on his back.

“Syndicate leaders Orpheus and Achilles haven’t been sighted in public for some time, leading some to believe they may have been behind the attack. We are still waiting for a representative to take official responsibility, but the explosion has already been declared a terrorist incident, with the president expected to make an address this evening with what we know so far.”

Chapter Notes

Sorry about the title, I had to do it, for the meme

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Tommy woke up slowly, aching all over, buried under a pile of blankets. He pushed them away, only to find his hand was wrapped in bandages, though he had no memory of injuring it, or of anyone treating it.

He stood up, wrapping a blanket around himself and stumbling downstairs, still half asleep, wandering into the kitchen and raiding the cupboards for cereal, grabbing a carton out of the fridge. He wasn’t paying full attention and it tipped out of his hand, nearly falling but he managed to fumble it back up, shoving it onto the table.

He turned around to make sure no one saw him, even though there was no one else there, just in case. He opened the cupboard with a wave of his hand, using his powers to float a cup over, pouring himself a glass of juice, muttering to himself irritably.

“...attack took place in the early hours of yesterday morning. Multiple guests were injured, with thirteen needing hospitalisation, however, thanks to quick action at the scene by police units and members of the hero agency attending the fundraiser, no fatalities have been reported.”

He poked his head around the living room door hopefully, but there was no sign of Kristin. The TV was playing on its own, the remote left out on the table, along with a half-finished mug of cold coffee.

He made himself comfortable on the sofa, slurping his breakfast down, flicking through the channels. The news was all pictures of the explosion, the wreckage splashed across all the headlines in high definition, it seemed to be all they could talk about.

Now in full daylight, it looked a mess. The domed roof was obviously gone, sections of the wings on either side collapsed in, blackened, a collapsed pillar hanging dangerously off the edge, broken glass

littering the floor.

But, all things considered, nowhere near as bad as it could have been. It was mostly the top floor that was damaged, and most of that was already covered by tarpaulins, clean-up crews sweeping up the glass, some of it still looked salvageable.

He switched to another channel, which was showing photos from the public, most just shaky camera videos and screaming. Another one popped up, this one a little more professional, and he sat forward, recognising himself in the moments after the explosion, no doubt taken by someone in the crowd behind.

He was lying on the floor, half sat up, Void's arm over him protectively, dark silhouettes outlined against the flames. It was gone as soon as it came, but it left him feeling odd, suddenly back there again, lying on the cold concrete. He switched the channel quickly.

Another photo flashed up on the screen, a grainy CCTV image of a man in a dark hooded trenchcoat and white skull mask in an alleyway, the lower jaw of the mask missing to show just his mouth. Another figure stood next to him in black body armour, similarly masked, though his was a bleached gas mask, warped into a boar's skull.

"Syndicate leaders Orpheus and Achilles haven't been sighted in public for some time, leading some to believe they may have been behind the attack. We are still waiting for a representative to take official responsibility, but the explosion has already been declared a terrorist incident, with the president expected to make an address this evening with what we know so far."

Tommy stared at the masks as if he'd be able to see underneath, to get any clues of who they were, but the photo was barely good enough to see their outlines. He recognised it instantly, it was famous, taken a few years ago.

Minutes later they attacked a mall, taking two hostages, neither of which were ever seen again. It was one of the few physical pieces of evidence the Syndicate existed at all at the time. Even now there was very little footage of them, and what existed had been evaluated and taken apart and pored over by experts to no avail. They left nothing behind.

"The Police Commissioner, who was attending the event at the time..." He flicked back quickly to the channel he just passed. Kristin stood on screen still in her formal uniform, looking tired, the hall in flames behind her, the segment obviously filmed soon after he left.

"The building was thoroughly searched beforehand, both on foot by officers and by trained munitions dogs, all measures that could be put in place, were." She had to speak up, over the shouting. "While I can't speak for my partner division on the security while the event was taking place, the public does not need to worry about the ability or professionalism of Manberg's police."

"I'm probably going to get in trouble for that." A voice remarked from behind him, startling him out of the almost trance the grim news had on him. He turned to see Kristin leaning against the door behind him, watching the TV.

"You're back!" He leapt up. "How long have you been standing there?"

"Not long." She didn't get any further before he ran over, hugged her tightly. She leaned back, trying to get a look at his face.

"Is everything alright?"

“I was so scared.” He whispered, clinging on. “I didn’t know what was happening, I wanted to look for you, I tried.”

“I can handle myself.” She said, her tone firm but not unkind. “You don’t need to worry about me. Besides, I got out in better shape than you did.”

“Alright, didn’t have to fucking put it like that.” He said defensively. She reached up, pressing her hand against his forehead.

“At least your temperature has worn off.”

“Shitty power.” He leaned his head against her arm. “What’s the use if I just burn out whenever I use it.”

“It’s a good power, as long as you don’t overdo it.” She corrected. “And you definitely overdid it, but it is what it is.”

“You’re not mad?”

“Of course not. You did what you had to, and I would have done the same in your place. I’m proud of you.” He beamed proudly, sitting back down.

“How’s your hand?” She took it gently, holding only his fingers so she didn’t press on the wrappings. “Are the bandages holding up?”

“It’s fine. What happened to it?” He tried to bend his fingers a little, but it just hurt. “I don’t remember anything.”

“You must have burned it while clearing debris, it went through your gloves.” She turned it over, and then let go, satisfied. “We only noticed when you got back home. It’s nothing serious, but just to be safe.” He made room for her on the sofa, rearranging the cushions, shuffling aside so she could sit down.

“So, what did you mean you’ll get in trouble?”

“Got an angry memo about suggesting the Enforcers could be to blame for the oversight.” She didn’t seem too concerned about it, her tone resigned, if not a little bleak. “It makes it much harder for them to scapegoat me and they don’t like that. Not that it’s hard to scapegoat my officers, they’re useless, incompetent, and corrupt.”

“Sounds awful, worse than my job.” Tommy grinned. “You should quit.” Kristin just sighed, shaking her head in a tired sort of way, running over the same conversation they had a thousand times before.

“You know I can’t. My position guarantees your safety. I’m not arguing about it again.”

“Yeah felt super safe when a building dropped on my head.” He muttered, but backed down at a warning glare from her. “Have they found anything yet?”

“It was absolutely a bomb.” She began. “Not a gas leak or anything, I mean we already pretty much knew but we have confirmation now, but I’m genuinely stumped on how they got it in.”

“Haven’t they checked the CCTV or something?”

“That’s the thing. This is how we know it was Syndicate work, the office that all the CCTV was routed to was thoroughly burned to the ground, there’s not a trace left, their tracks have been wiped clean.” Tommy sat forward, intrigued

“No backups, nothing?”

She shook her head. “First thing we checked, not only was one backup server elsewhere in the building destroyed, the other had absolutely nothing on it of any kind of use,

“It probably wasn’t an inside job, because they didn’t know the location of the second server, that’s not a detail they’d overlook, but they knew too much, but we can’t prove that’s because of an informant.”

“Yeah, the Warden said they always research targets beforehand.” He recalled. “At least, that’s what they think.”

She took a sip of the cold coffee she’d left on the table, pulling a face, but drinking it anyway. “They have to, there’s no way they’d get away with this otherwise. It was supposed to have one of the most robust security systems in the city, they shouldn’t have been able to get past it. The building was searched so securely beforehand, we have body camera footage to prove the area where the bomb was found was cleared before, so it happened during the ball, all guests were vetted, and the Enforcers had discrete x-ray machines and sniffer dogs around all entrances, nothing showed up.”

“So there should have been witnesses.”

“Yes.” She ran her hand through her hair, frustrated. “But there’s nothing. We’re still questioning staff, but only very few could have had access to that area. We don’t even know what we’re looking for. It’s not like an informant can tell us if they were involved, they might not even know it was their fault, it wouldn’t be the first time Orpheus has wiped someone’s memory.”

Tommy shuddered. “I don’t want to think about that.”

“Me neither.” He played with the hem of his bandages, twisting it in his fingers, and she glared at him warningly. “Leave them alone.” He dropped them quickly.

“So, it’s just going to end in nothing again?”

“They know how to cover their tracks, it’ll most likely end in a dead end, and I’ll have to sort out the backlash of it all.” She said wearily. “They’re a ghost in the system. I don’t know how I’m expected to do anything about it, not with what I’m working with.”

“Hey at least the Enforcers are here, then people have someone to hate *more* than the police.” Tommy said wryly. Kristin just shook her head, sighing heavily.

“All of what I just said stays between us, alright. Most of that is still confidential, I don’t even know if the Warden has been told yet.” She warned him. He nodded, draining the rest of his orange juice glass.

“No work talk outside the house, I know the rules.”

She put her arm around his shoulders, ruffling his hair fondly. “I know you know the rules, but you also have a mouth on you, and you don’t think things through.”

“I’m not that bad! Also, how did I get back last night, I think I blacked out.”

“Void took you back.” She took a sip of the cold coffee.

“Void knows where I live?” Tommy shot up, eyes flying open

“Relax,” Kristin said gently. “He only knows the street, he said you got coherent enough to let yourself in, and I stopped by about an hour later on my way back from the precinct to check on you.”

“I don’t like that. I barely know him.” Tommy complained.

“Niki trusts him, and besides, we have a very ordinary house, it’s nothing memorable.” He huffed, still not happy about it, but there was nothing he could do.

“How long was I asleep for?”

She squinted up at the clock. “It’s like 2pm?”

“Why didn’t you wake me up?”

“You needed the rest, and it’s not like you were going to be working today anyway. Oh and you might not be going in tomorrow either.” She added. “Niki said they’re only having seniors in while they work out how to sort this out.”

“Fucks sake.” He flopped back, staring at the ceiling. “I want to gooooo.”

“It’s supposed to be your day off anyway.”

“Yeah and I’m bored already.” He waved his bandaged hand at her. “Plus I could get Supreme to fix this.”

“It’s nice to spend time with you too.” She said teasingly. “Seeing how little time we get together these days.”

“No that’s not what I meant!” He cried, flopping back dramatically. “You’re bullying me.” She just laughed. “Whatever. I like spending time at home, I’m just bored right now. A bomb went off last night, I shouldn’t be lying around.”

“I know. I don’t think I’ll be getting a day off for a little while because of that, I have to go in again in a minute. I’ve got a meeting with the president about the address tonight, just debriefing him on what we know.” She yawned, stretching lazily. “I actually thought you might like to come along.”

“That sounds miserable.” He said honestly. “I’ll just stay here.”

“It’s valuable experience.”

“For what?” He stared at her. “They’re not letting me in the meeting, ain’t no fucking way I have the clearance for that.”

She relented. “Fine, I lied, I thought we could get waffles after.” He sat up immediately. “It was going to be a surprise, I have a brief break, it might be the only one I catch this week so we might as well make the most of it.”

“Where’s the meeting?”

“Presidential press room, you can just wait in the public area of the mansion where they do the tours, it’s not an issue, and I shouldn’t be too long.” She drained the rest of her coffee, standing up, “You’ll have to hurry though.” He took off at a run, clattering up the stairs. “And take a shower, you still stink of smoke!”

“Got it!”

“And don’t forget to bring your washing down!”

“Will do!” He slammed his door shut behind him, getting showered and dressed in record time, yanking his hoodie on as he went, dragging his wash basket behind him.

He dumped it by the washing machine, not bothering to untie his shoes, just pulling them on, stumbling outside. Kristin was already waiting in the car. He hopped into the passenger seat, and she pushed her laptop bag into the back to make space.

“I was about to leave without you.”

“You wouldn’t dare.”

“Did you remember…”

“Brought my washing down.” He interrupted, snatching the aux cable. “Dibs music.” They pulled out of the driveway, Tommy sticking on an old playlist, leaning against the window, humming to himself, dozing off a little, more tired than he was willing to admit. She let him sleep, turning the music down a little so it didn’t disturb him.

She shook him awake as they pulled up to a barbed-wire fence, a military checkpoint outside, and he wrestled his ID out of his pocket, handing it over to the Enforcers waiting. They were waved past without too much hassle, Kristin’s arrival clearly expected, pulling up into a small private car park, at the side of the large white mansion of a building.

He began to unplug his phone, pulling his headphones out of his pocket, when she caught his wrist suddenly, looking up. He followed her gaze to a familiar blonde-haired figure, getting out of a car on the other side.

“You don’t know nobody.”

“Don’t know nobody.” He agreed, passing her the bag she’d put in the back. “Got it.”

She hopped out of the car, waving to the blonde man, who recognised her immediately, waving back, walking over. “Hello there!”

“Hi.Tommy, this is Phil Craft.” She introduced them carefully, one eye on Tommy. “Phil this is my son Tommy, we met last night.”

“Nice to meet you,” Phil said warmly, holding his hand out. “I heard a lot about you.” Tommy shook it, before glaring at Kristin accusingly, who gave him an innocent smile, before checking her watch with a wince, starting up the path quickly.

“I wasn’t expecting to see you here.” She mentioned as they walked, curious.

“Me neither, actually. I got a call to the office out of nowhere about half an hour ago, with a presidential invite and you can’t really decline those.” He turned back for a moment, checking he’d

locked his car. “But considering I’m an architect and they have a ruined building, I can take half a guess.” He hesitated. “I’ll be honest, I’m not entirely sure where I’m going, I haven’t been here before.”

“Just stick with us.” Kristin offered immediately. She scanned her ID at a small side door and it turned green, letting them inside, and up a small flight of stairs. There was a small waiting room type area at the top, all dark oak panels and red couches, lined with old portraits he didn’t recognise, an old grandfather clock against the wall.

A well-lit corridor led into it, while the corridor at the other end was lined with red-tape, marking the entrance to the family areas of the president’s residence, out of access to the public. A door led off it, voices coming from inside. A woman with a staff lanyard stuck her head around the door, recognising Kristin with a nod, before opening it for them. “They’re waiting for you.”

“Stay here.” She pointed to one of the couches. “It shouldn’t be too long.” He took a seat, and the door closed behind her. The voices behind it faded away and he pulled his phone out, starting to play a game.

Someone was walking down the restricted side of the corridor, behind the barrier, keeping to the shadows. Tommy didn’t pay them much attention at first, staring intently at his phone. He finally looked up for barely a split second out of curiosity, but the distraction cost him, the game over screen popping up.

He swore quietly, stuffing it in his pocket, sitting up, only to do a sharp double-take as a familiar figure emerged from the shadows. There was no sign that they’d seen him yet, but he was coming closer, and Tommy was too taken aback to stop staring.

Tubbo of all people was standing opposite him, emerging from the roped-off area of the corridor. He was wearing more comfortable clothes this time, a smart sweater over his shirt, still pretty formal but better than a suit, the same beanie crammed over his head.

He was clearly alive and well, and oblivious to his shocked audience, pacing back and forth in front of the old grandfather clock restlessly, staring at the floor, glancing at the door from time to time. He stopped, stealing a glance at Tommy, and then again, eyes narrowed.

Tommy shifted his feet, uneasy. “What do you want?”

“Do I know you?”

“No.” He lied quickly, a little too quick. Tubbo turned to face him fully, dark brown eyes digging into him.

“Liar.”

“Wait what are you...” He stopped short of finishing his sentence, the pieces rapidly falling into place, the strange behaviour, the odd name, and his appearance here of all places. Realisation dawned painfully slowly as he realised why he looked so familiar. “I’m stupid.”

He got an odd look, but he ignored it, rubbing his eyes. “That’s why the president was looking at me funny last night.” He mumbled to himself. “I’m so stupid.”

“What did you say?”

“You’re Tobias Schlatt.”

Chapter End Notes

I really like the character designs for Orpheus and Achilles, I really wish I could draw.

Anyway, sorry if this chapter is a bit late I was planning to have more time to write but forgot Phil was streaming tonight and Phil takes priority, I'm very sorry, I'll be back to edit it all in the morning as usual.

Oh and I'm @SoulfirePhoen1x on Twitter if you want updates

Chapter 7

Chapter Summary

“I don’t know what you’re talking about.” Tubbo turned over, looking up at the sky through the leaves. “What could possibly be weird about this?”

“I mean.” He stopped his pacing, counting off his fingers. “You were crying at a party, we talked shit about the police, got caught in the middle of a terrorist attack. Then you let me into the restricted area of the White House, talked shit about your dad, showed me a wholeass rainforest you’ve grown, threatened to call Enforcers on me, and most importantly proceeded to insinuate that the president gets no bitches. Not necessarily in that order.”

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

The president’s son sighed heavily. “Say it louder, so the tour groups can hear you.”

“I’m not with the tour groups.” He said quickly. “I’m waiting for my mum.”

“What are you, twelve?”

Tommy pulled a face. “No. She’s in a meeting, we’re getting waffles afterwards, big man shit.” He shut his mouth quickly, realising what he just said, but the other boy didn’t seem to care.

“I want to make fun of that, but waffles does sound good. Who’s your mum?”

“Kristin Walters.”

“What happened to your hand?”

He decided to go with the truth, as much of it as he was willing to give at least. “Burned it.”

“Huh. When was that?”

“What’s with the questions?”

Tobias studied him for a few, uncomfortable seconds. “Just wanted to be sure.”

“Sure of what?”

“Hello Theseus.”

Tommy choked, taken completely off guard. “I’m sorry?”

“We met at the party.” He said, bored. “That’s why you kept looking at me all confused just now. Also you’re bad at whispering.”

“Don’t know what you’re talking about.”

“You’re a terrible liar.” Came the flat reply. “I know who you are. And you know more about me than I want you to, so let’s just be honest with each other.”

Tommy tried to hold out, but gave in, clearly seeing he was fighting a losing game. “Fine. You got me,” He chewed his lip, suddenly very nervous. “Sorry if I was rude. I had no clue you were Tobias.”

“Tubbo.” Tubbo cut in. “Don’t call me Tobias unless adults are around, they get weird about. And don’t start that.”

“Start what?”

“The awkward thing. You were fine last night when you just thought I was some kid.”

“Yeah but that was different.” Tommy sat back in his chair. “You’re oddly okay with all of this. You aren’t worried I’ll tell someone?”

Tubbo gave him a sharp grin. “Who would believe you? That Tobias Schlatt is a hybrid? That he was swearing on a rooftop escaping a party and making fun of the police, who’s going to listen to you?”

“You’re evil,” Tommy said admiringly. “And also I’m insulted that you picked up on me that quickly.”

The other boy’s smile widened. “I mean I didn’t know for sure until you said.” Tommy kicked himself mentally, hard. “And you gasped when you saw me, and you have the same hair, you have injuries from last night, and the way you interacted with Ms. Walters at the party suggested you knew her so it would make sense for her son of the same age as Theseus to be...” Tubbo continued, a smug grin plastered across his face.

“Alright I get it, you’re smart.” Tommy cut him off. “Just don’t tell the Warden, or I’m dead.”

“You have a dirt on me, I have dirt on you, we’re even.” He

He went back to his pacing again. Tommy didn’t bother to hide his staring now.

“Uh. How long will they be?”

Tubbo stopped, stepping back and studying the door appraisingly as if it had the answer he was looking for. “Depends. Either half an hour or three, nothing in between really.”

He flicked through his phone, bored, fidgeting with the zip of his jacket. “Is there anything else to do here except walk around and stare at boring old people’s portraits?”

“Excuse me.” The older boy said, no humour whatsoever apparently in his voice. “Those aren’t just any boring old people, they are the founders of this nation.”

“I literally can’t tell if you’re joking.”

The grin came back, irrepressible. “Of course I’m joking, I have to look at their faces every day, I hate them.” He looked left and right. “Tell you what, there’s some really funny ones back here.”

“In the...private section?”

“Yeah, where else.” Tubbo waved his hand insistently. “Come on.”

Tommy hovered by the tape. “Do you normally just invite random people into your house?”

“We met last night so we’re technically not strangers. Also, I’m bored out of my mind.” He explained irritably. “I can’t even go outside because it’s a ‘security risk’, so I don’t really care right now.”

“That’s just not how that works.”

“Are you coming or not?” He asked again. “I’m not waiting forever.” Tommy looked at the corridor, and then back at his seat, and then back again, weighing up his options

“Fuck it. If I get in trouble I’m blaming you.” He jumped over the rope, following him.

“He cheated on his wife, she had a money-laundering deal going with the secretary of state.” He began to point out portraits. “She’s the reason there’s a bullet lodged in the cabinet of the upstairs pool room.

Tommy’s mouth dropped open. “You’re kidding.”

“Nope! I’d show you it, but the rooms are being used by a bunch of my father’s friends at the moment.” He said. “He was an asshole. He’s dead now.” Tubbo pointed at a picture of a man in military uniform. “Same with him. And that one, I drew on that one as a kid.” He hopped up on a bench, pointing at the faint hints of a moustache under another “No one noticed, luckily.”

“This is much better than the tour on the public side.” He said admiringly. “I did it once like ten years ago, it was miserable.”

“I could tell you so many stories about those, but I don’t like going in the public bit.” Tubbo tossed over his shoulder. “Besides, there’s a reason these are here, they’re all the ones that are a bit more on the dodgy side so they don’t want them on public display.”

“Is this whole place all just old portraits?”

“Pretty much, everyone who’s anyone ended up getting a portrait at one point, I think the painter was paid per piece of art he did and this is the result. He stopped at the end of the corridor. “The rest is just meeting rooms and pool tables,” He sighed dramatically. “And more meeting rooms, and more pool tables.”

“That must be so boring.”

“I know.” He straightened suddenly, taking off at a trot, “Come on!”

Tommy chased after him. “Wait, where are we going?”

“I want to show you the greenhouse.” He said cheerfully. “It’s my favourite place here, it’s less boring.” He turned left and right, down a maze of corridors, and down a set of stairs. Most of the lights here were off, and portraits were covered with fabric, or missing entirely, nothing more than odd darkened rectangles on the wall where they’d hung, where the paint had been hidden from the sunlight. It was a vastly different side of the house to the one the tour groups saw, but not one that he had much intention of lingering to explore.

“You’d better know your way out, cos I sure as hell don’t,” Tommy called out

“I know the way. I just might not tell you.” The other boy tossed over his shoulder.

“You’re scary, you know that right?” He didn’t get a response as Tubbo turned another corner, skidded to a halt in front of a set of double doors.

“Here we are.” He took a small rusty key out of his pocket, unlocking them, pushing them open.

A wave of damp air hit them, as they walked into nothing less than an indoor rainforest, filled with all kinds of plants and trees, butterflies hanging on the leaves, curved glass nearly two stories above their head. Concrete paths twisted through it, under arches of flowering vines and drooping branches, small ponds scattered here and there filled with colorful fish. Tommy stared around slowly, taking it all in slowly. “Oh, so you’re like RICH rich.”

Tubbo shrugged uncomfortably. “I guess.” He flicked a light switch on, and small lamps turned on, lining the darker pathways. picking up a bucket from outside a small shed leaning against a wall, mostly hidden by vines. “Technically it’s not ours, all this stuff will get left to the next president when we go, it belongs to the estate.”

Tommy snorted, “Schlatt’s been in power for like 20 years now it’s not happening any time soon.”

There were bowls of fruit leftovers hidden in the undergrowth, packed with all kinds of butterflies feeding off of them. Tubbo hauled the bucket over, taking a small shovel and heaping it up, tipping it onto one of the plates, Tommy watching on curiously. “Where do you get all this?”

“Kitchen scraps.” He replied, busying himself. Tommy knelt down to see what he was doing, glancing around to check if anyone else was watching.

“Don’t worry, no one else comes in here.” The other boy told him, sitting back, pleased, dragging the bucket back over to the shed, scraping an old plate into a compost bin. He refilled it and set it back down under a bush, dusting his hands off.

“Whose idea was it to just have a wholeass rainforest here?” He asked curiously. “If no one’s even using it.”

“It didn’t always look like this.” The older boy sat down by the pond. “It was just a greenhouse, and the plants kept dying but I had nothing better to do.” He watched Tommy wander around with an oddly intense stare, unblinking.

“Why are you looking at me like that?”

“Like what?”

Tommy waved his hand in the other boy’s general direction. “Like...that.”

“I don’t know if I should take this personally.” He replied, completely straight-faced.

“Sure, you do that.” They fell into silence for a few minutes, neither quite knowing what to say next.

“What do you think of it?” The question was innocent enough, but there was almost a hint of desperation like he was hanging on Tommy’s every word.

“It’s very cool. Well, warm, but cool.” Tommy quipped. Tubbo groaned at the joke but at the same time, he lit up, really lit up, for the first time, his smile reaching his eyes.

“Thank you.” He said proudly. “I’m really pleased with it.”

“What does Schlatt think of it?”

“Oh, he doesn’t come down here.”

“Must be hard being his son, all famous and shit.” Tommy wandered around the edge, watching a small cluster of butterflies. They rose into the air as he approached, scattering up into the branches. Tubbo watched them go, thinking.

“I wouldn’t say I’m famous.” He rolled onto his stomach on the edge of the pond, head on his hands, watching the fish. “You didn’t work out who I was.”

“Yeah, cos I’m fucking stupid.”

“Eh.” He dipped his hand in the pond, stirring the water lazily. “I don’t go anywhere, I don’t get shown on TV, most people don’t have a clue who I am and I like it like that.” He thought it over for a moment. “Also, you’re fucking stupid.” Tommy rolled his eyes, not bothering to respond to that

“I have bees. I checked them already today though, and there aren’t many, just enough to keep this place pollinated.” He seemed almost bursting to tell someone about it. “Don’t worry, they’re not aggressive.”

“Bitch, I’m not scared of some tiny insects.” He exclaimed. “How dare you.”

“You should be,” Tubbo said ominously and then proceeded not to elaborate on that, at all. “They’re by the wall, and they have a way into the garden, if they want, I didn’t want them to be trapped in here.”

“That’s cool.”

"I want to get turtles. I managed to fix up an old incubator I found, I've been reading up on them and everything." He continued. "We have the ponds, it's the right temperature, I just don't know where you'd get turtle eggs from."

“Nice.” He was distracted by a long pink flower hanging down over his head. He reached up, pulling it down gently to have a closer look. It hung heavy with pollen, slightly sweet-smelling.

“I wouldn’t touch that.”

“Why not?” Tommy didn’t look back, not really paying any attention.

“It’s poisonous.” He yanked his hand away and the other boy dissolved into helpless laughter. Tommy spun around, pointing an accusing finger at him

“I’ll fucking push you into that pond if you’re not careful.”

“I’d just call the Enforcers.” He retorted

Tommy froze. “You wouldn’t.”

“I wouldn’t,” Tubbo admitted. “They’d just get annoyed at me for bothering them.”

"But you're the president's son?" He asked, confused.

"I'm not his actual son. I mean." He had to stop, grinning to himself. "Can you really see him, y'know."

Tommy shuddered. "Okay, I see what you mean." He started to pace around the edge. "This is weird. This is so weird."

"I don't know what you're talking about." Tubbo turned over, looking up at the sky through the leaves. "What could possibly be weird about this?"

"I mean." He stopped his pacing, counting off his fingers. "You were crying at a party, we talked shit about the police, got caught in the middle of a terrorist attack. Then you let me into the restricted area of the White House, talked shit about your dad, showed me a wholeass rainforest you've grown, threatened to call Enforcers on me, and most importantly proceeded to insinuate that the president gets no bitches. Not necessarily in that order."

Tubbo cackled, hopping to his feet, jumping onto one of the stepping stones. "It sounds much worse when you say it like that." He started humming to himself, pleased, playing hopscotch over the pond. Whatever guard he had up in the meeting room was clearly gone, oddly childlike all of a sudden.

"And when I leave?"

"You're never going to leave. We're going to be best friends." He said happily.

"Do I get a choice?" Tommy eyed him suspiciously. The smile he got in return was almost endearing if it wasn't also oddly threatening

"Nope!"

"Do you have any other friends?"

"If I had any, Schlatt made sure they were gone pretty quickly before they found anything out." He patted his beanie, just as light-hearted.

"That sounds miserable."

"It is, but you find ways to work around it." He reached the other side of the pond, turning and going back again, jumping from stone to stone

"What if he finds out about me? I mean, I'm a meta. He doesn't like metas either." Tommy asked, a little unnerved. "And it's too late to hide the hybrid thing from me now."

"It's not just about me being a hybrid, it's about the president's son being a hybrid, that's what he really doesn't want people knowing." He played with the flower stem in his fingers, twisting it back and forth. He set it down firmly, sitting up. "But it doesn't matter, because he won't find out."

"He can't find out, can he?" Tommy turned around, scanning the room.

"There's no cameras in here." He was quickly assured. "I know which ones there is, and isn't. He has some rooms checked for bugs regularly, cos he's paranoid, and also needs somewhere to do his shady business deals."

Tommy inhaled sharply. "You can't just say that!"

"It's not like the entire of Manberg doesn't know he's shady, how is this going to change anything."

“You have no filter, at all.”

“I do.” His tone shifted, a little sadder for a moment. “I just don’t need it right now.”

“Oh.”

“You won’t tell anyone, will you?” For a few moments, he looked vulnerable, oddly out of place with the greenhouse, and all that came with it, in a sweater that didn’t look like he’d ever chosen it, both too young and too old. Tommy hesitated for a few moments, trying to come up with a good response

“Who would believe me?” He said finally. Tubbo held out his hand.

“Pinky promise?”

He scoffed. “We’re not kids.”

He was fixed with a solemn look. “This is a serious matter Theseus, I’d ask that you treat it with a suitable amount of respect.”

“How do you keep a straight face while saying that?”

“Practice,” He replied just as evenly, his hand not moving. “So?”

Tommy gave in. “Fine,” He locked his finger with Tubbo’s. “Pinky promise.”

Chapter End Notes

I pinky promise not to traumatise Tommy for a few chapters. After that, I make no guarantees

I am on Twitter with updates by the way - <https://twitter.com/SoulFirePhoen1x>

Happy Doomsday anniversary, I support the pig in a crown's rights, but more importantly, I also support his wrongs.

Many kinds of waffles

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Tsunami found them a little while later, wandering into the greenhouse, seemingly familiar with it. She raised an eyebrow on seeing Tommy there, but said nothing, clearly not looking for him.

“Tsunami!” Tubbo poked his head out from behind a tree, running over.

“Hello Tubbo.” She said warmly. “It’s been a while.”

Tommy looked back and forth between them, caught off guard. “Wait, you know each other?”

“She basically raised me.” He said offhandedly. “Nothing much.”

“I wouldn’t go that far. But I was a presidential bodyguard for a few years, before I was pulled back to hero work.” She explained. “You know about this, I know I told you.” Tommy rolled his eyes

“Yeah well okay I didn’t figure out it was him for a bit.”

“Basically she found out I was a hybrid so Schlatt insisted she had to stay with me and not tell anyone.” He waved his hand in Tommy’s general direction. “He found out too. And I know who he is, so we’re even.”

“Like teacher, like student,” She ruffled Tommy’s hair before turning serious. “I don’t think I need to tell you not to let Schlatt know.”

“I know,” Tommy said quickly. “It’s fine, I’m being careful.”

“Good. Anyway,” She turned to Tubbo. “The meeting’s over. Your father is looking for you.” He visibly wilted.

“Fuck.”

“Better go see what he wants.” She said sympathetically. “Tommy, Kristin’s waiting for you upstairs. You probably want to slip out before the Warden catches sight of you. If he sees you’ve been running around the restricted areas of the house you’ll be in trouble.”

Tommy sat up. “The Warden’s here?”

“Of course he’s here.” She held the door open for them. “It was kind of our party that got blown up yesterday. The Captain is still on-site at City Hall so he brought me along.”

Tommy glanced over at Tubbo, meaning to ask something, but the other boy had gone quiet, looking thoughtful. They walked back through the halls in relative silence, much more subdued. As they were approaching the last corridor Tsunami caught his arm, pulling him back, letting Tubbo walk ahead. “I need to talk to you.”

“Uh. Sure?”

“Not here exactly, later, some things happened that I want to fill you in on.”

He glanced over at the other boy. "I thought..."

"No, I don't mind." She dismissed that worry quickly. "That's not a concern to me."

"You don't mind?"

"That you somehow managed to befriend the son of the most powerful man in the country, who's surrounded by security pretty much 24/7 and has a very overprotective parent?" She sounded amused. "Yes, it's a little unusual but I'm not surprised, I saw you talking last night and I think both of you could do with friends your own age. I would warn you that it's dangerous, both because of his father, and because of who he is, but you're not stupid." She turned, walking down the corridor again. "I also just wanted to see how you were doing, you left last night in a bad way, I was worried. Kristin promised you were alright but I had to check for myself."

He wiggled his bandaged hand at her. "Well, I'm terribly injured."

Her expression immediately turned to concern, reaching out, taking his hand, checking it. "How did you do that? Are you alright?"

"It's nothing, just burned it a bit, Kristin's just being careful. I'm a bit tired, I'm fine." He reassured her. "I'll be back to normal tomorrow for sure."

"Just rest today, you've earned it." She said kindly. "You're not very good at taking breaks."

"I learned from the best." He replied cheekily, earning himself a tap over the ear. "I'm going to get food with Kristin, cos I don't know when she'll have a day off. After that, I'm not doing anything, so don't worry."

"There you are!" Kristin was standing in the lobby, Phil next to her. "I told you to wait, I said I wouldn't be too long."

"Yeah, but I got bored." He wandered over, stepping over the barrier. "It took too long." She gave him a curious look, along the lines of 'we'll talk about that later'.

"I invited Phil to join us getting food while we were waiting for you, as the poor man ran out of the office without breakfast." She changed the subject, taking her car keys out of her bag. "His sons might meet us there, I think?"

"Still waiting on them to confirm." He held up his phone. "I'll tell you as soon as I know."

Tommy wasn't fast enough to hide his crestfallen face. "But you said..."

"He said he'd pay."

"Oh, that's fine then." Tommy backtracked immediately, to the amusement of the adults.

"Tsunami." The Warden's voice cut in. He was stood by the door, half-hidden in the shadows, towering over most of the people there. His gaze swept over Tommy, lingering on him for a few moments, before turning away, waiting.

"That's my cue." She sighed. "I'd better get back to work. I'll see you around?"

"I might drop by later," Kristin said. "We can talk then; I have some things I need to clear with you."

“Lovely, I’ll see you then.” She followed the Warden out, and Tommy trailed back to the car, hopping in.

“How was the meeting?”

“Dull, for the most part.” She turned onto the drive, waiting for Phil to follow them. “I can’t tell you a lot of what happened, for obvious reasons, but Tsunami can so she’ll probably fill you in.”

“Did they find anything?”

She looked up at her mirror, and then over at him. “What do you think?”

“No?”

She nodded simply. “Same as always. No work talk for a bit, I think. I’ve heard enough terrible things for the day.”

“Waffle talk.” He agreed. “I can waffle.”

“I know you can, for hours and hours and no one can get you to be quiet.” She teased him.

“I’m going to get pancakes out of spite.” He retorted.

The gate slid open in front of them, letting them out onto the main road. “You always get pancakes.”

“Well, this time they’re going to be spite pancakes.”

“You do that.”

He turned over, watching the car behind them. “I will.”

They parked in the mall car park, taking the elevator down as Tommy couldn’t be bothered to walk, following the familiar route to the street out front. The diner was simple, red and white tiled floor, booths with red leather seats, there were a million like it, but this one belonged to Kristin and Tommy’s, it was theirs.

Not really, but it was the first place they’d met, nearly six years ago, an angry young boy fresh out of care, and a first-time foster mum who’d read all the books and watched all the videos, and was trying so hard to get it right.

They’d come here many times since, for birthdays and holidays, when he left school, when he got accepted into the Tower training program. It felt very odd to him to think about bringing anyone else here, let alone someone they’d barely known for a day.

They had a booth they always sat in, near the front by the window, with just enough of a gap in the planters outside to spy on life going past. Tommy walked ahead, securing his seat in the very corner, right where he could see out.

“My sons will be here in a minute,” Phil told them. “They said they’re just coming down the street.”

A waiter brought menus over, and Kristin passed one to him. “Do you want your usual one?” She asked him quietly. “Or something else?”

“Usual.”

“Alright.” She gave him a quick glance of concern. “Still tired?”

He stifled a yawn. “A bit.”

Phil glanced down at his phone. “Oh. They’re here, apparently.” The door chimed, the bell ringing above it as a familiar pink-haired figure walked in through the door. Tommy buried his head in his hands.

“You’re kidding me.” Techno’s eyes snapped to him, a slow grin spreading over his face. “Not you!” Tommy hissed.

“Hello to you too.” He sounded far too pleased. Tommy flipped him off. “This is Tommy, from the bookshop.” Techno explained.

“Oh, you’re that Tommy.” Phil said, surprised. He seemed to have put something together in his head, eyes flickering to Kristin, and then back again. Kristin leveled a suspicious look at Tommy.

“What have you been up to?” He stared at his mug pointedly, tracing his finger across the table.

“Working.”

“He likes to cuss me out whenever I come in.” Techno slid into a seat opposite him. “I don’t mind, it makes things more interesting,” Another figure wandered in, wearing jeans and a yellow hoodie, hands stuffed into his pockets. He slid down next to Techno, eyeing Tommy warily. “This is Chayanne. Chayanne, that’s Tommy from the bookshop.”

Chayanne waved at him, and Tommy narrowed his eyes. “Oh so you must be the geography nerd.” Chayanne nodded, glancing at Techno, who made no effort to look up from the menu he’d snatched up.

“He was the one who had the atlas idea.” He told his brother. “Don’t mind Chayanne, he doesn’t talk a lot.” He addressed this to Tommy. Tommy nodded slowly,

“In my defence I was joking and then he took me seriously. Bad idea, wouldn’t recommend, I think it was lame.”

“Well I thought it was very thoughtful of you.” Techno’s eyes flickered up over the menu, clearly trying to get a rise out of him. Tommy stared at the table; fist clenched around his knife.

“I’m going to start stabbing shit in a minute if you don’t shut up.”

“Tommy, be nice.” Kristin chided him gently. “Don’t let it get on your nerves or he won’t stop.”

“He’s being annoying!”

“Muuuum, he started it,” Techno mocked him from the other side of the table.

“Tech.” Phil glared at him. “Please.”

The older boy leaned back, looking pleased with himself, but Tommy wasn’t about to give up that easily. He narrowed his eyes, and delivered a direct kick to his ankle, succeeding in a brief, pained

look on the other's face. It disappeared as quickly as it came, Techno's eyes lighting up at the return of the game.

"I said stop." His father cut in tiredly

"I'm not doing anything." He said innocently. "It's just kind of hard for me to fit, cos I'm tall and all."

Phil leaned back, checking with a frown. "You're fine."

"Well, I can't be, because Tommy's foot keeps hitting my leg." He protested quickly, unable to stop a smile crawling onto his face. Phil closed his eyes slowly, dismayed at how easily he'd fallen into the trap.

"You're a grown adult, stop antagonising him."

"I would never do such a thing." Techno set the menu down, pressing a hand to his chest dramatically. "I'll have chicken and waffles."

Tommy kept his head down, pulling his game back up. If the targets he was shooting started to have the face of a certain pink-haired nuisance opposite him, that was his business and his business only. He only set it down when his food arrived, a stack of pancakes absolutely heaped with a frankly dangerous amount of golden syrup.

Chayanne was immediately distracted by a massive plate of fruit and pastries, eyes sparkling. Techno seemed to be watching Tommy, probably to get a rise out of him. Tommy cast a side eye at Kristin, hoping for rescue, but she was deep in conversation with Phil, a bowl of waffles and berries by her elbow almost going uneaten.

He stabbed into his pancakes with a particular vengeance, working his way through with a dogged determination, trying to distract himself. He began to slow after a little while, something Techno immediately noticed, latching onto it. "If you have too many, I can help." He volunteered; a grin full of false generosity.

"I'm fine," Tommy muttered. "I'm a big man, don't need your help." He forced the last pancake down out of sheer spite, feeling a little sick, but satisfied, sitting back and giving Techno a stubborn glare. All he got in return was a smug look of victory before the older boy turned back to his plate, very deliberately reaching out and picking up a bottle of sauce, squirting it all over his food.

"You...put ketchup on waffles." Tommy stared at him. "What is wrong with you."

"I like it. It reminds me of the blood of my enemies." He said this in such a flat tone that Tommy just kept staring at him, open mouthed for a moment. He looked to Kristin but she was still talking. He shook her shoulder slightly.

"Help me, he's mad."

"Be nice Tommy." She brushed him off, smiling slightly. He gave up, glaring daggers at his opponent.

But try as he might, the exhaustion and the warm food got the best of him. He leaned onto her shoulder sleepily, and she put her arm around him, glancing down fondly, the conversation fading away to a dull background buzz.

A hand shook him awake gently. "Tommy. Wake up." His eyes fluttered open slowly, and he yawned, finding himself on the sofa in their house, covered in a blanket.

"Good evening." Kristin was sitting next to him, a cup of coffee in her hand. He sat up, stretching.

"Did I really fall asleep again?"

"Yep. You barely finished your pancakes." He shot up.

"Wait a minute. What?" He looked around. "How did I get home?"

Her smile deepened. "Techno carried you out to the car."

"You're joking."

"Nope. You were out like a light, nothing could wake you."

"That's so embarrassing." He sunk back down. "Oh my god."

"They found it quite endearing, actually."

Tommy curled up. "I hate this. I hate this."

She laughed quietly. "They thought it was sweet." He flushed bright red.

"You could have just woken me up."

"I could have." She agreed. "But it was funny. And you need the rest."

"I'll fucking punt you." He narrowed his eyes at her. "Just watch me."

"I'll take your phone away."

He stuck his tongue out at her. "I need it for work."

"Speaking of," She pointed at the television. "I thought you might want to see this." His attention was drawn away from the fake fight to the screen. It was showing the press room, the president stood to one side, sleeves pushed up, speaking to an aide quietly.

At the nod of a reporter he stepped up to the stand without a word, immediately commanding the room's attention, waiting for silence to fall. When it did, he waited a few moments, as if enjoying the hold he had over the assorted crowd of journalists in front of him, before closing his notes almost arrogantly.

"Good evening. I'm sure you'll have heard of the events of the last 24 hours, and we still have had no official confirmation of the motives behind the attack, I think we have all come to the same conclusion, that once again, a certain group of radical terrorists have tried their hand at playing soldiers. But it doesn't matter." He smiled at the camera, relaxed, light-hearted. "It doesn't matter because they failed. Myself and my son are alive and well, City Hall is still standing, and it will be rebuilt, stronger and better than before, but this is about more than physical destruction, there are few other people with the nerve, the *audacity* to attack such an integral part of our city heritage, and while myself and the Agency have not always seen eye to eye, it cannot be denied that without their quick action last night, far worse could have come to pass." He paused for a moment, letting that sink in.

“I want you to remember this administration as one that, when it all comes down to it, is motivated by a political philosophy that puts you, the people foremost. When it comes down to it, our city, our country, must come first, and those that stand against that, stand against all of us. They leave us with no choice.”

His eyes seemed to bore into the camera, the intensity of his stare building, anger perfectly controlled, weaponised, feeding into his every word as he straightened, the smile falling away. “Make no mistake, there will be consequences. This has gone on long enough, they have gotten bold, thinking we have become complacent, but we have not. Once again, we are reminded of the ever-present threat of unregulated metahumans, of those who would attack the foundations of this nation for nothing more than the thrill of it, violence for the sake of violence, and it is our people that are hurt for it. These are cruel, selfish acts by radicals, nothing more, nothing less, we should not give them the dignity of the attention they so desperately seek. While I cannot release details of our investigations at this time, I can assure you, there will be no mercy for those who aid the Syndicate. Those who harbour their agents, who impede our investigations, will be dealt with at the highest level of the law as traitors to the founding ideals of this land. To those who wish to stand in our way, be warned, there will be no safe haven for terrorism, not here or in any of our allied nations. That is all.”

He gave a short nod, and stepped off stage, leaving a vacuum behind him.

Chapter End Notes

I was quite tired today, so sorry if the chapter is a little shorter than usual, I wasn't quite feeling it, but it turned out alright. Looping villain songs while writing Schlatt's speech was fun as well. Speaking of songs, I do have a playlist for this fic, but I realised I can't post it because it contains so many spoilers. So, there's that to look forward to I guess.

Anyways, hope you all have a lovely day, and as always, any comments are more than welcome

Chapter 9

Chapter Summary

Archangel's portrait stood near the entrance, more of a memorial now. The portrait depicted him in his prime, dark wings spread, landing on a rooftop, a reckless smile on his face, maybe 19 or 20 years old at the time. It was back before they had proper suits, his outfit a mix of whatever they could put together, black cargo trousers and a bulletproof vest, cut open at the back to let his wings through. A vase stood at the bottom, the flowers never ran out of water, a few little tributes pinned to the wall underneath.

"Heroes don't die, they go missing in action." He whispered, kneeling down to read the note he'd left a year ago. "I hope I live long enough to be half the hero you were."

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Tommy nearly slept through his alarm, jolting awake. He stuffed his kit into a duffel bag, swinging it over his shoulder, grabbing whatever food he found out of the cupboards, a handful of cereal bars, some raisins, an energy drink, and a bar of chocolate, checking the bus timetable stuck on the fridge, chewing on an apple, locking the door behind him. The bus driver barely looked at his pass, waving him on, and he found a seat near the back, tucking himself into the corner.

His phone began to ring in his pocket, and he pulled it out to see Kristin's contact. "Hello?"

"Good morning." She replied. He squinted out of the window up at the sun.

"It's the middle of the afternoon."

"It was a joke. I just wanted to make sure you were awake." She said lightly.

"I had my alarm set, it's a workday. I'm on the bus."

"Well, that's a first." She teased him. "Are you feeling alright?"

"I'm not that bad." He protested.

"No, I know." There was a voice behind her, and she covered the phone for a moment, before coming back. "I just wanted an excuse to call, you weren't awake when I left."

"I told Niki I'd go to hers." He shifted around, making himself more comfortable on the hard seats.

"Isn't it a bit early? She'll still be doing lessons."

"It'll just be Ranboo," He said indifferently. "I'll just wait until she's done."

"Alright. Be nice to him okay?"

He pulled a face. "When am I ever not nice to him?"

There was a long pause over the call. “You go out of your way to make that poor boy’s life miserable.”

“Not my fault he’s so fucking tall.”

“That has nothing to do with it.” She paused. “Text me when you get back, alright?”

“Will do. Bye.” He pushed both headphones back in, nodding to the bus driver, stepping off, pulling his hood up, keeping his head down, treading a familiar route along the road.

The houses of District 14 were crammed together, every inch of space taken up, the winding streets some of the few remnants of the old city, now virtually left to fall into disrepair, weeds growing up through the cracks in the pavement. In the distance the dark shadow of Pandora’s Vault overcast the former industrial area, abandoned warehouses and broken down factories lining the river banks.

Nothing was ever built there again after Pandora, no one wanted to build there. Rising high into the sky with dark stone, surrounded by layer after layer of barbed wire, towers at each corner filled with armed guards, bristling with cameras, the prison had an air of it’s own, cold and unforgiving, no one came in, and no one ever left.

A prison for the worst of the worst, the metas too dangerous to kill, but too dangerous to live. He didn’t linger, keeping his head down, as if the Enforcers lining it would be able to find him too.

He found himself at the end of a street, tucked away around a corner. The house in front of him had a tiny garden, just like all the others around it but every inch was covered in grass or flowers or bushes, climbing up the walls, suspended on trellises, a bright contrast to the dull gravel and weeds on either side.

The windows were open, a soft breeze stirring the curtains, a low waltz playing upstairs. The bricks were crumbling, and the paint was peeling off the windowsills in some places but it was well-loved, and looked after.

He let himself in, the door wasn’t locked, trudging up a creaky set of stairs. A room on the second floor had been converted into a dance studio, light and airy, a mirror across one wall. Niki was stood en pointe, arms raised, slow, graceful, floating across the polished wood, weaving in and out of the sunlight, her hair loose around her shoulders instead of a normal tight ballerina’s bun.

“Uh, hi.” A voice said hesitantly from behind him. He turned to see a tall, brown-haired figure emerge from the kitchen, ducking under the door, and immediately shifted his face into a scowl.

“Hi Ranboob.”

The other boy raised a hand. “Hey Thomas.”

“Fuck off.”

“Don’t call me Ranboob then.”

“Boys, do we have to do this every time?” Niki put her hands on her hips, looking up. She was dwarfed by both of them, but they immediately quietened, looking guilty

“Can we try it one more time?” Ranboo asked awkwardly. “I think I’ve nearly got it.”

Tommy busied himself digging through his bag, trying to find his charging cable, only half watching them. Ranboo was a little less graceful, more awkward on his feet, but then he was only learning, and maybe anyone would seem graceless next to Niki. The moment the music came on a calm swept across her, and she glided across the floor, like gravity didn't have a hold on her. Tommy couldn't help but be impressed, not that he had any intention of saying that out loud.

"Alright, that's enough." She paused the song, and Ranboo sunk back against the wall with a sigh of relief. She grabbed a bottle of water, drinking thirstily, tossing one to him and he snatched it out of the air surprisingly fast.

"Are you done yet?"

"You could join us." Niki said pointedly. "Rather than complaining."

He pulled a face. "I'm good thanks."

"It's a good strength exercise. And a lesson in patience."

"Yeah but punching things makes me strong too and I don't have to be patient about it." He said, looking pleased with himself

"So how was your week." Ranboo pulled a jumper on, leaning against the wall, trying to make conversation.

"Great. Hope yours was awful."

"Aww man." He sat himself down. "That was uncalled for."

Tommy rolled his eyes. "Your mum was uncalled for."

"I don't have parents, so you're not wrong." He replied, straight-faced. "But I bet your mum is....a lovely lady, actually, I met her a few weeks ago, she's really nice."

There was a long, stagnant pause. "Good talk." Tommy said finally

"Good talk." He picked up his bag. "I'll see you...later I guess." He said to Niki. She waved to him

"Take care, watch the bottom step, I think it's a little loose."

"Will do." He let himself out, the door shutting downstairs and Niki retreated to her room to get changed, coming back a few minutes later with her bag, setting it down in the kitchen. She picked up a hair clip from the side, pinning her hair out of her face.

"Right. Ready to go?"

The doorbell rang, and she frowned. "Did he forget something? Come in!" Footstops trotted up the stairs, and a familiar curly-haired face poked his head around the door.

"Oh hi Tubbo." Niki lit up, surprised. "How did you get here?"

The goat hybrid grinned at her. "I slipped out, don't tell Schlatt."

"As long as you won't get in trouble." She looked doubtful.

"I won't. He's in meetings all day, no one will notice."

Tommy looked between them, confused. “When was this a thing? Does he just drop by normally?”

“Nope. I got really bored so I’m going to the park, this was just on the way.” He hummed thoughtfully. “Oh. Before I forgot.” He reached into his backpack, pulling out a small clump of slightly battered white lilies, holding them out proudly. “For you.”

“Oh these are lovely.” She took them, admiring them. The solemn, collected boy Tommy had seen before was gone, replaced with an almost childlike delight in the praise he was given, a light sparkling in one eye, even as Niki studied the flowers slightly suspiciously. “Did you steal them from the garden?” She asked

“No?”

She turned them over. “Tubbo one of them still has roots on.” He didn’t even look remotely guilty.

“Do you like them?”

“Did you steal them?”

“I grew them myself.” He said defensively. “They’re not exactly mine but I put all the effort in.” The suspicious look melted away.

“Well, that’s fair.” She dug a chipped porcelain vase out of a cupboard, running it under the tap and trimming the roots off, setting the lilies in it, setting it down on the mantelpiece with a pleased smile. “There.”

“Anyway, I’m off now. Bye.” He vanished down the stairs again without another word, and Tommy stared at the door.

“Does he do that often?”

“Not really no, only when he can slip past security. The alarming thing is, I never told him where my house is, I think he just trailed me home once.” She smiled fondly. “Like a little duckling, but he won’t let me call him that.”

“Like a stalker,” Tommy replied, pulling a horrified expression

“No no, he’s harmless. Poor boy just needs some friends.”

He fixed her with a look. “You would look at a dangerous wild animal and call it cute and wrap it up in blankets. Next time I come here you’ll just have some feral cat you’ve adopted that scratches people’s eyes out for fun or some crazy shit like that.”

“I would.” She locked the door behind her. “And he would be lovely, and sweet, and sleep on my bed and catch mice for me. And he’d probably have better manners than you.”

Tommy stared at her. “You scare me.”

“Good.” She said sweetly. “Now, wait outside.”

“Are we getting the bus?” He said hopefully.

“We have time to kill, Ranboo was tired, and he has work later, so he left early, we can walk.”

“I just walked all the way here.” He complained.

“You’ll have to do plenty more walking tonight.” She told him without an ounce of sympathy. “Call it training.”

It took them nearly an hour to reach the Tower, having to cross several Districts to get there. It was halfway up a hill in District 4, having belonged to a banking firm before it was badly damaged in a meta attack nearly 20 years ago.

The owner had handed it over to the Warden in gratitude for halting the attack, it had been fixed up, and while it wasn’t the prettiest of buildings, it was functional, holding everything they needed, from the training hall to meeting rooms, offices and a canteen. There was never quite enough money to do all the repairs it needed, but it was enough.

“Get changed and wait for me,” Niki ordered. “I’ll be back.” She headed upstairs, and he slipped into the changing rooms, getting into his gear, stuffing his duffel bag into a locker, trotting back out into the lobby.

The lobby took up most of the ground floor, a large, open carpeted room, with a front desk that was currently unmanned, portraits of some of the more famous heroes in the agency on the walls around the edge. Tsunami had one, around the back near the stairs, next to the Captain’s, though the Warden had declined one. Tommy was only really interested one though, wandering over to it.

Archangel’s portrait stood near the entrance, more of a memorial now. The portrait depicted him in his prime, dark wings spread, landing on a rooftop, a reckless smile on his face, maybe 19 or 20 years old at the time.

It was back before they had proper uniforms, his outfit a mix of whatever they could put together, black cargo trousers and a bulletproof vest, cut open at the back to let his wings through. A vase stood at the bottom, the flowers never ran out of water, a few little tributes pinned to the wall underneath.

“Heroes don’t die, they go missing in action.” He whispered, kneeling down to read the note he’d left a year ago. “I hope I live long enough to be half the hero you were.”

“Theseus?” Niki walked over, holding a few pieces of paper. “Ready to go?”

He stood up, “Anything I should know?” Tsunami held up the papers.

“Three new missing persons, two students and an intern at an architecture company. No sign of forced entry, two were suspected meta, the third must have been a bystander. Deer hybrid.”

Tommy’s heart sunk. “Syndicate?”

“Sure looks like it.”

He leaned over, looking at the faces. Two young men, pretty generic descriptions, no one that stood out in any way, and a young woman without much sign of her hybrid status, a small passport photo included of her staring into the camera, short blonde hair, and a bored expression, wearing a knitted sweater. “It’s getting worse.”

She scanned the papers, troubled. “You have to be so careful about using your powers now. Not just to keep your identity secret, but if the Syndicate gets even a hint of powers they’re on you faster than we can even track them.”

“How are they finding metas faster than a wholeass government department.” He protested. “That makes no sense.”

She shrugged. “Who knows. We’re supposed to look out for them on patrol.”

“As if the Syndicate takes people and then just leaves them to wander around,” Tommy said sarcastically, swinging his radio carelessly as he walked.

“Speaking of the Syndicate, did you see Schlatt’s speech.” She tucked the papers away.

“Uh hu. My mum woke me up.”

She reached out, water wrapping around her hands from an open bottle on her belt, boosting her up to the rooftops, and Tommy followed her, landing next to her. “Just wanted to get away from anyone who could overhear.” She guided the water back into the bottle, putting the lid back on. “I wanted to speak to you beforehand but I didn’t get the chance. They were discussing tightening the Control Act.”

He looked up sharply. “You’re joking.”

“I’m afraid not.” She smiled without any humour. “Because apparently, it’s not enough that we can’t get a normal job unless we get a license that says we’re close enough to ‘normal’ to not be a threat, have harsher consequences under law, can rarely live anywhere other than a compound, and aren’t necessarily entitled to a trial.” The sarcasm was dripping off her words with an unusual vengeance, the normally mild-mannered woman’s voice tight, keeping her anger carefully under control.

“Apparently he also wants a curfew on active metas and hybrids, apparently that will help them isolate who’s responsible for the bombings or some nonsense excuse.”

“Will it actually happen?” He asked.

“Chances are, the Warden can intervene, and either way, any restrictions probably won’t affect us, we have our contracts, we’ve already signed away our lives to them, they don’t need anything else from us, just stuff you need to know.”

“The Warden said it was getting better.” He said sadly. “That they were thinking of loosening things.”

“They were.” She agreed. “We were close to being able to get civilian status for retired metas from the agency, that would have been huge.”

Tommy laughed. “How many of us have actually retired?”

“Be careful.” She said gently. “I know I tend to speak my mind about this kind of thing, and you do too, but watch your mouth around other people. Just criticising the way they wrote the Act will land you in hot water with most people.”

“I know.” He quietened a bit. “So, what’s the Warden going to do about it?”

“As long as Pandora exists, there is no reason to tighten the Act.” She said firmly. “Because we can just say if there’s a dangerous meta they can be contained in there.”

They skirted along the park in one of the upper districts, and Tommy skidded to a halt, peering over the edge, recognising a familiar face.

Techno was stood at the side of the park, under the old silver birch trees. He looked relaxed, feeding the ducks with his little brother. The wind stirred the water, sending ripples scattering across its surface, carrying a slight chill as the evening wore on.

“Do you know him?” Niki slowed, turning back, following his gaze. “Oh isn’t that Techno?”

“You know him?” She shook her head.

“Not really, just from the ball, we talked for a bit.” She looked thoughtful. “If he hadn’t suggested you leave when he saw the president come over, you and Void and the others would have been caught right underneath.”

“I don’t like him.” Tommy said stubbornly

“He probably saved your life.” She said, amused by the immediate reaction

“Yeah well, he’s a dickhead.” He added. “And very annoying.”

She laughed. “So he gives as good as he gets huh.”

“Don’t know what you’re talking about.” They walked on for a little while, Tommy dragging his feet as they went. Their radios went off suddenly as they reached the end of the road, Niki gancing down.

“Robbery at a corner shop, a block away.” She ran up a ladder nearby, crossing onto the rooftops, following a small red alert on the screen. She jumped across an alleyway, kneeling at the edge of the next building, spying out the shop, Tommy crouching down next to her. Raised voices were coming from inside, but otherwise there wasn’t much sign anything was wrong.

“Please can I help?” Tommy begged. “Please, just this once.”

She shook her head patiently. “You know the rules. Not unless completely necessary.”

“I’ll be careful.” He pleaded. “I promise.”

“Rules are rules. Stay here, tell me if there’s any trouble.” He nodded unwillingly, and she flew down, disappearing inside the door. The raised voices suddenly stopped, silence falling. A sudden gunshot rang out, and he jumped to his feet. “Are you alright?”

“He’s a terrible shot.” Came the calm reply. “Nothing to worry about.” He sat back, resigned to wait it out, restless.

Her voice came in again over the earpiece a minute or later. “All clear.”

“That was quick.”

“Nothing out of the ordinary.” She replied. “Just a poor attempt at grabbing the till, the gun was probably loaded with blanks. Nothing I haven’t seen a hundred times before.”

“Can I come down now?”

“Stay where you are. I’ll be out in a minute.” He paced back and forth on the rooftop, bouncing up and down on his heels, bored, watching the police arrive. They carried out an unconscious figure, followed by two more on their feet, balaclavas pulled over their faces, shoving them in police cars. A hooded figure stepped out of the shadows in the alleyway below, but Tommy wasn’t paying attention,

leaning his head on his hands, watching her speak to an officer, handing over the gun. “How long are you going to be?”

“Not long. Don’t be so impatient.” The figure below looked up sharply, hearing his voice, and Tommy glanced over. A white boar mask stared back at him.

A cold chill ran down his spine and he backed away from the edge slowly. “Tsunami.” He said tightly, pressing his hand to his earpiece. “Tsunami I need help.”

“What is it?” She asked over her earpiece, a little distracted.

“It’s Achilles.”

Chapter End Notes

3 :)

This one was a little rushed as it was late. I would say more, but I'll just leave you with possibly ominous numbers

How not to deal with a juggernaut

Chapter Summary

“Theseus run!” The shout cut through his concentration. He stumbled forward, racing towards the fog cloud, dodging left and right, trying to draw the villain as far away as possible. “I got her!” Blaze’s voice came in over the comms. “Disengage, get to the patrol cars!”

“I’m trying!” He plunged into the fog blindly, barely able to see the ground under his feet. “He’s following me.” He wasn’t looking where he was going, blinded by the fog. His foot hit a drain, and he stumbled, slamming into the ground, crying out. His head spun, and he rolled over, only for a dark shape to form out of the mist. The awful white mask loomed over him, Achilles drawing his sword with an ugly ringing sound.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Tsunami’s head shot up, making eye contact with him, whispering something to the police officer next to her. He retreated to his car quickly, yelling at his radio and Tsunami backed away towards the wall. “Come in. HQ come in, we have a situation.”

“What is it?” The Captain’s voice crackled over the comms.

“I need the Warden. Now.”

“He’s busy.”

“Not for this he isn’t. Syndicate sighting on location of our last alert.” She said urgently. “Achilles, appears to be alone.”

He made no effort to hide, striding out of the alleyway into the brightly lit street, the hood hiding any of his features the mask didn’t, standing easily six foot tall, broad-shouldered. Unlike theirs his outfit was purely functional, all-black aside from the bleached boars mask, tusks jutting over the lower lip, body armour strapped over his shirt, not that he really needed it.

“Backup is on its way.”

“Stay down Theseus.” She whispered. “No matter what happens, stay down.” She stood out in the road, water rising from the drains, gathering from the air around her, forming into a heavy fog. Achilles turned slowly to face her, and she took an instinctive step back. “He’s here for a fight.”

“Tsunami, do not engage.” The Warden’s voice cut in. “Do not engage.”

“I don’t have a choice.” For one of the first times since he’d known her, she sounded genuinely afraid. There was a rapid hail of bullets, the police drawing weapons, and Tommy ducked instinctively, covering his head with his hands.

They had no effect. Achilles stood untouched in a circle of crushed bullets, they’d impacted with no effect at all. She reached for the staff on her back, preparing herself. Sirens were wailing, more police

cars screeching in.

The officers on site were handing out riot gear, throwing down barricades in a frenzy. The villain seemed to regard it all with a kind of amusement, in no rush. He shot forward suddenly, and it was all she could do to get out of the way, staff spinning around her hands, forming a shield in front of her.

She was holding her own somehow, dodging and weaving around him, just quick enough to stay out of his reach, but he was just as fast, parrying her blows with twice the strength, it was all she could do to hold him off as he drove her across the street, slowly but surely gaining ground.

She hesitated, barely for half a second, but it was enough. His arm slammed into her chest, fully picking her up and throwing her across the street. She slammed into a lamppost, sliding to the ground with a muffled cry.

“Tsunami!”

“Theseus hold your position.” The Warden ordered.

“Back up is coming, don’t move.” The Captain added

“He just punched her into a lightpost!” He reached out, desperately trying to slow the villain down as he stalked towards her. Red light spun around Achilles’s chest, before shattering into thin air uselessly. He didn’t even stop to look at it.

“He negates them dumbass.” Tsunami hissed, pushing herself up stiffly, scrabbling for her staff.

“Fuck! I forgot.” He barely even had time to think about it, looking around for something, anything to help, snatching up a handful of small stones off the roof. He jumped down, cushioning the fall with his powers, throwing them at Achilles’s back as hard as he could. “Over here ya fucking prick!”

The villain’s head snapped around, looking straight at him with a terrifying intensity, the mask hiding any emotion. Tommy felt the sudden surge of courage draining out of him, backing away slowly.

“Yeah, that’s what I thought motherfucker.” He managed. “You’re not so scary in person, you know that? You’re just a fucking piece of shit.”

“You talk a lot.” A low, cold voice echoed from under the mask, and he nearly stopped dead, staring at him.

“H...Hey man. So you can actually speak?” The villain didn’t dignify him with a response, taking another step closer, making him flinch back. He was toying with him, not even moving to attack, letting him duck and dodge, heart pounding in his chest.

“Theseus run!” The shout cut through his concentration. He stumbled forward, racing towards the fog cloud, dodging left and right, trying to draw the villain as far away as possible. “I got her!” Blaze’s voice came in over the comms. “Disengage, get to the patrol cars!”

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The villain staggered back suddenly, arms appearing from the haze, locking around his neck. “You leave him alone!” Tsunami clung onto him, wrestling him into a chokehold. She was barely half his

height, but she hung on with everything she had, teeth gritted together. “Go!”

He scrambled to his feet. “But.”

“Go!” He backed away, turning and racing towards the patrol cars. An officer waved him over and he angled towards him, barely daring to look back, feet flying over the ground. An arm wrapped around him, and he struggled blindly, kicking and shoving. Wind rushed past his ears before he was set down again on solid ground. He grabbed onto his attacker's arm, lunging for it before he was quickly dropped.

“Did you just try to bite me!” He turned around, Void holding up his hands defensively. “I’m helping!”

“Oh, it’s you.” They were back on the rooftops again, safely away from the fight. He released his held breath, almost sinking down in relief. “You can’t fucking do that.”

“What, save you from a rampaging Syndicate leader.” The other meta raised an eyebrow. “I’m sorry, I won’t in the future.”

“Just give me some warning. I thought you were him.” He moved to run to the edge of the building, but Void grabbed his arm, dragging him back, pinning him in place.

“I’m getting deja vu.” The older meta muttered. “Stop rushing into things!”

“I need to help!” He tried to drag himself free. “Let me go!”

“You need to stay put.” The Warden cut in over his earpiece. “Apprentices can’t get involved in this.”

Another crash echoed up from below. “I need line of sight!” Android called out. There was an awful screech of metal against metal, the fog clearing just as Achilles carved through a barrier of riot shields, the steel crumpling like paper. A patrol car had been flipped onto its side, another with its roof caved in.

He glanced up, seeing his cover had disappeared, and turned abruptly, disappearing into the darkness. Android gave chase, but Blaze hung back, already resigned.

Tsunami landed on the rooftop, looking around frantically, only relaxing when she saw him safe, Void still holding onto his arm. Tommy shrunk back a little, guilty. “I’m sorry, I...” He didn’t get any further before she pulled him into a tight hug.

“What were you thinking?” She whispered, “You could have gotten killed.”

“I uh...”

“That was reckless and stupid.” She continued. “I’m so glad you’re okay.”

“Are you mad at me?” He asked. “I feel like you’re mad at me.”

“I’m not mad at you.” She stepped back, checking him all over for injuries. “You scared me. Are you alright?”

“You’re asking me that? You just piggy-backed Achilles and then got thrown into a lamp post.” He protested.

“I’m fine, answer the question.”

“I’m good.” He reassured her. “Where did he go?”

“No clue.” She leaned back, looking down the alleyway he went down as if she’d see him. “Best case scenario really. We were lucky, whatever he was doing, he wasn’t looking for a proper fight this time.”

“You call that not looking for a fight.” Blaze landed next to them, looking annoyed.

“He wasn’t trying. I’ve seen him when he’s trying, he nearly killed me, if I hadn’t gotten his weapon off him that time I don’t know what would have happened and that was luck.” She stared down at the twisted lamp post. “That could have gone so much worse though.”

“Yeah I’m with Tsunami. He could have had me a few times there, I got sloppy.” Android said over the comms. “It normally takes three of us just to slow him down, let alone run him off, but he barely put up a fight.”

“Anything?”

“Nothing. Even I lost him.” The cyborg reported, grim. “He just vanished.”

“Head back.” The Warden ordered. “We won’t find him, and there’s no point risking another ambush. Tsunami any clue why was he there?”

Tsunami shook her head, taking a deep breath to steady herself. “I don’t know.”

“He came out of nowhere.” Tommy hugged his arms to himself, still a little shaken. “I was standing by while she dealt with the robbery and then he was just right there.”

“Android and Blaze, question the robbers.” The Captain ordered. “I don’t like the sound of this at all.”

“You think it was a trap?” Void asked quietly, drawing closer to the group.

“Awfully fucking convenient for him to be so close by to an alert.” Blaze pointed out. “He stopped fighting as soon as he saw there was backup.”

“Yeah if we hadn’t got here in time.” Android trailed off.

“Sorry I took so long. I got in early for my shift, they didn’t even tell me what was happening.” Void said

“I’m just glad you’re here.” Tsunami patted him on the arm. “Even if this is the second time this week my apprentices have had to save each other from the Syndicate

“Wait. He’s your other apprentice?” Tommy took a step back, staring at him.

“Didn’t you know?” Tsunami blinked owlshly. “I’m sure I told you.”

“No? You said you had another apprentice but I just assumed it was some kid who’d only just joined, not someone already on patrol.”

“Theseus he’s literally been here for months.”

Tommy threw his hands up. “Yeah, and you never bought it up! I just never asked.”

“I’m sure I’ve mentioned it.” She said disbelievingly. “Well, you know now.”

Void sighed, looking down at the street. The fight had thrown over some tables outside of the shop, items scattered across the floor. “I guess we’re on clean-up duty.”

He started to pick them up, setting the table upright. Tommy picked up a small black and grey octopus toy, studying it for a few moments.

“Put it back.” Tsunami popped up by his elbow, glaring at him.

“But I’m attached.” He complained.

“Either buy it or put it back.” She repeated, more sternly this time.

“I don’t have any money.”

She put her hands on her hips. “Then put it back.”

“Awww but you could get it for me?” He said, mostly joking, but with a slightly hopeful note in his voice.” Void held up a red and green one, grinning.

“Come on. You know you want to.”

“Copycat.” Tommy hissed.

“I’m helping you!” He looked down at it. “I mean if all else fails, if we both steal it and run really fast it’ll be harder to catch us.” Tommy acknowledged this with a nod, studying his octopus, eyes narrowed in deep thought.

“Theft is bad.” Tsunami said patiently. “I shouldn’t have to tell you this.”

“Theft is fine if you don’t get caught,” Tommy argued, picking up a basket of bruised fruit.

“They won’t miss just one.” Void added. “Well, two.”

Tsunami stopped, looking between the two of them very slowly. “Thank god you two haven’t transferred, if the Warden found out you had that attitude...” She raised an eyebrow, not bothering to finish.

“I would take excellent care of him.” Tommy retorted, tipping the basket into the trash. “I’d call him Shroud, he could be my son.”

“It’s a soft toy Theseus.”

“And? Much less work than a real child.”

She laughed. “You make a good point.”

“He’s not coming back is he?” Void glanced up the street where Achilles had vanished.

“Now why did you have to go and say that.” Android gave him a tired look. “I was just starting to feel better.”

“It’s a fair question.” Blaze pointed out. “We should probably let the others know they have to be careful. They’re always more active after a hit, but they’re going after individual people this time.”

"I mean yeah, it was the same after they hit the mall two months ago, there were more sightings of them for about two weeks after," Android added. "But they didn't try this."

"Yeah but we're too scary," Tommy said smugly. "He fucking ran."

"You should be taking this seriously." Android seemed on edge, shifting from foot to foot, his robotic eye scanning the streets constantly. "A Syndicate leader just appeared out of nowhere, and then vanished and we don't know why."

"Let them play, we all just had a bad shock." Tsunami waved him off. Her expression switched to concern suddenly and she crossed over to him, taking his metal hand. It was bent, and damaged, the palm caved in on itself. "What happened?"

"Took a nasty hit. That's the first time it's been that damaged in a while."

"Get the Warden to check it out as soon as possible." She said firmly. "You can't just leave that."

"I will," His robotic eye whirled. "As long as you get those bruised ribs checked out when you get back." She patted him on the shoulder.

"Don't worry about me, I've had worse." She glanced over her shoulder to check how they were getting on. The street was nearly cleared, and she nodded in satisfaction. "Alright, good work." Tommy lit up with the praise. "We'll leave the rest to you, we've got a patrol to finish."

Blaze huffed. "As if anyone else will want to cause problems tonight. Come on, kid." He waved to Void, who trotted after him.

She waited for him, falling in next to him as he walked. "If you see somewhere I can refill my water bottle let me know."

"Will do." He sighed heavily. "I'm sorry. I didn't stand a chance."

"You'll get better." She promised. "You have plenty of time to train."

"So does he." He said glumly.

"He won't be here forever. One day we'll get rid of them all." She said quietly. His shoulders slumped, picking at his sleeve.

"Every time they do something everyone just gets mad, and it all goes backwards again."

"We are making a difference." She said kindly. "We always have been, it might be slow, but it's working. You never worked when it was bad. I didn't really either, I came in at the tail end of it." She admitted. "Nowadays we're accepted, we're famous, it wasn't always like this. They used to hate us, there'd be protests to end the Agency, now, even with the Syndicate we're heroes, back then we were just agents, they can't take that away from us."

"Do you really think it's going to work?" He asked hopefully.

"I mean I hope so. It's our job." She replied. "It's what we do, we don't have any other option but to make it work. And think about it, you're going to graduate in a year or so." She told him. "Even in that time, things will have gotten better. Then this will be your fight too."

"But then we can't patrol together." He protested. "What then?"

"You won't need me anymore then." She said amused. "You barely need me anymore now."

He puffed his chest up, grinning. "Yeah I'm going to be the best, I don't need anyone." He boasted, before pausing. "You'll be at my graduation right?"

"You're my student, of course I'll be there." She said lightly. "That's kind of the point."

Tommy mulled that over for a minute. "What would you do, if you weren't a hero?"

"I don't know. Anything specific?" She was half distracted, answering messages on her comms.

He shrugged. "I don't know. Job? Holiday, anything?"

She brightened immediately, eyes lighting up, glancing up for a minute. "I think I'd like to be a baker."

"A baker?" Tommy wrinkled his nose. "Really?"

"What! I'm good at baking." She said proudly. "You were the one that said that, when I bought those butterfly cupcakes in." He pulled a face and she laughed, tapping him over the back of the head. "Don't you play those games with me."

"I would never." He looked up at the sky innocently.

"I think I'd like to go travelling somewhere." She added after a little while. "It's hard to go somewhere nice when you have to be on call every hour of the day. Somewhere with coral reefs, for someone with water powers I've never really seen the sea."

"Why don't you just go?"

She gave him a patient smile. "We don't get passports, remember?"

"Oh." He looked down. "Yeah."

"You still working at that bookshop?" She asked, trying to change the subject to something more light-hearted. Tommy jumped, badly.

"Bookshop, what bookshop." He lied immediately.

She laughed, shaking her head. "If someone asks about your life out of uniform, you can act stupid, but not that stupid."

Tommy flushed red. "Habit."

"You're normally more alert than this. You alright?"

"Just tired." He dragged a hand over his eyes, plowing on ahead down the street while she spoke to her radio

"We can end patrol early." She relayed. "The Captain just passed the message on, we've done enough." Tommy wilted in relief, turning around. They headed back to the tower in relative silence, both exhausted.

He made a beeline for the changing rooms, keeping his head down, wiping the mud off his suit where he'd fallen over, packing it away. He pushed his headphones in tiredly, heading for the door, checking

his phone.

She caught back up with him near the door of the lobby, trotting over to head him off, “Hey. Are you going home now?”

He nodded, pulling his headphones out. “Are you?”

“I’ve got another patrol with Void later, I’m not done yet, but I just wanted to say I’m proud of you.” She said seriously. “I didn’t say it after the fight because I was still shaken up, but dealing with the Syndicate alone is hard, taking them on head-on? Grown metas have died from less, it was stupid, but it was brave.”

He grinned. “Yes, I’m so brave. I thought it through so well.” She patted his shoulder.

“I’m sure you did.” An amused expression crossed her face. “You take after me a little too much. First Tubbo and now tackling Achilles? You won’t have much of a life expectancy at this rate.”

“I’m learning from the best.” He quipped.

“I’ll see you tomorrow. Punz and Blaze agreed to a group training session, and Void will be there.”

He grinned from ear to ear. “Can’t wait to hang this over the others head. And I’ll get to beat up Void.”

“We’ll see. He’s good.” She warned him. “You’ll have a tough fight ahead of you.”

He shook his head, disagreeing but not bothering to say it out loud. “See you tomorrow.”

“See you then.

Chapter End Notes

2 :)

slightly shorter chapter today. Mainly to avoid uni assignments I’m meant to be working on, nothing gives me so much motivation for literally anything else than urgent assignments.

What’s really funny is that I actually had a different name for Achilles, and changed it because I felt like it, before looking at his powers and going, damn, I really should have gone with this all along. I wish it was deliberate, it wasn’t.

I love octopusduo. There was no need for the plushie bit, but I wanted to

Chapter 11

Chapter Summary

He evidently had enough. His hand shot out, grabbing the back of Tommy's suit, fully picking him up, dangling his feet off the ground.

"Are you done?"

Tommy's mouth dropped open. "You didn't tell me you were cracked, this is unfair." He whined.

"I will drop you," Void said calmly, holding him at arm's length

"I will drop kick you bitch." He began to struggle, trying to yank himself free, lunging at his captor. The other boy looked amused.

"You can't even reach me."

Chapter Notes

The promised allium duo crumbs have arrived

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

"I'm back!" He called out quietly. None of the lights were on, except a dim one from the kitchen. Kristin was waiting for him, hair up in a messy bun, wrapped in a dressing gown. "It's late?" He said, confused. "You didn't have to stay up for me."

"Niki sent a text to say you might be a little shaken." She held up her phone. "Are you alright?"

"She set me up." He grumbled, digging an apple out of the bowl.

"Set you up?"

He curled up in on himself a little. "You'll get mad at me."

"Spit it out." She said, not unkindly.

"I kind of. Fought a Syndicate leader." There was a long silence. He risked a glance over. "You're not mad at me?"

She sighed heavily, shaking her head. "You're in one piece, that's what matters.

"You don't seem surprised."

"He hospitalised three of my officers, wrecked two patrol cars, and destroyed some of our riot gear." She said tiredly. "They said an apprentice was involved in the fight, and I had a feeling it would be you."

Tommy sat up, worried. "Are they..."

“They’ll be fine.” She reassured him. “It’s caution, more than anything.” He sunk down, eating his apple slowly. For a moment the reality of the fight caught up with him, that he could have been next to those officers, or worse. He set the fruit down, suddenly feeling sick. “What are you thinking about?”

“Nothing.”

She came over, leaning on the counter, studying him quietly. “I can see the cogs turning.” She brushed a lock of blonde hair out of his face, curling it around her finger. “Tell me, did anything else happen?”

He nodded quietly. “Kind of. Not like that, just thought it could have been me.”

“Niki would never let that happen,” Kristin said. “We both know her, she’d rather something happened to her than anyone laid a finger on you.”

“She tried. And speaking of Niki, I was talking with her afterward,” He continued. She sat down on the chair next to him, leaning her head on her hand, listening attentively. “And I don’t know why but we were talking about holidays and she said she really wanted a holiday but she can’t leave the country. And it only just got to me.”

Kristin hummed sympathetically, reaching out and putting her arm around his shoulders, pulling him over. “I’m so sorry sweetie.”

“Like, I know it happens.” He tried to explain. “I know that, I think about it a lot, but remembering it is hard.”

“There will be change.” She promised. “You and the others at the Agency are working so hard, as are so many other people, not just in the city but across the country, it won’t be this way forever.”

“It’s just taking so long.” He said, his voice plaintive. She pulled him a little closer, letting him lean against her

“You know, I knew someone, a long time ago.” She said quietly. “You remind me of him, headstrong, but kind, quick to laugh, chaotic, but with the same, rigid sense of right and wrong, with your lines you’d never cross.” She paused for a moment. “You look like him too.”

“What does that have to do with anything?”

“We went our separate ways.” She said softly. “My job, and what he did just wasn’t compatible, it wasn’t safe for either of us to know each other, and we didn’t know each other amazingly well in the first place, but I think about him sometimes. We both wanted to make the world better for people like him, like you, and he left promising he would.”

“Did he?”

“I haven’t heard of him since.”

“Do you think he’s still alive?”

She smiled sadly. “I don’t imagine there’s much chance of that. But if anyone could make things better, he could, and you’re just like him.”

"I hope you're right."

"Sleep, things will look better in the morning." She promised. "They always do. Are you here tomorrow?"

He shook his head. "I have to leave early for training. Why?"

"I'm working from home in the afternoon," She explained. "I've done everything I can at City Hall, just have to get through a lot of paperwork, and then I'm out in the evening for a meeting so I was hoping we'd be home at the same time for once." He looked downcast, and she ruffled his hair. "Never mind. Sleep well."

He almost slept too well, sleeping through his alarm, but a very enthusiastic sparrow outside his window woke him up. He muttered a handful of choice expletives at it, before noticing the time, rushing to get ready, almost tumbling down the stairs, digging through the kitchen cupboards

"...found in the harbour this morning." He looked up, hearing a newscasters voice from the other room, peeking through the door. Two images hung on the screen, the two men he'd seen on the missing persons reports yesterday.

"The Syndicate's death toll is rising and yet there has been no decisive action to end their reign of terror over the city. We don't know where, or when they will strike next, every attempt to slow them down has been met with failure. Only last night Syndicate leader Achilles attacked the Agency hero Tsunami on patrol, both her and her student could have been killed and they weren't even able to stop him, he left pretty much of his own accord."

Kristin shut the TV off abruptly, noticing he was there, but it was already too late. Tommy stared at it, feeling hollow. "I saw them yesterday." He said heavily. "Well, not saw them, but we were given posters."

"I'm so sorry."

"How many?"

"Just those two. We're still hunting for the third, so there's a chance."

"There never is." Tommy cut her off. "Not with this." She didn't even try to argue, accepting it, turning back to the sink. He grabbed his things, filling his bottle, and was out of the door without another word.

He followed the same old routine, off the bus, up the hill, through the lobby, get changed, stash his belongings, he'd done it so many times he could walk it in his sleep, heading for the training hall. Spark and Purpled had already arrived, Punz watching them spar, giving them pointers here and there. Android was leaning against the wall, checking something on the screen in his arm.

Tsunami strode in, Void at her heels, looking very awkward. He almost seemed to be trying to hide behind her, though the fact she didn't even come up to his shoulder wasn't helping that much. She pointed him over to the benches on the far side. "Go sit down. We'll be along in a second."

Android looked up from whatever he was doing, greeting her with a rare smile. "Hey."

“Hello Jack.” She said cheerfully. The cyborg gave her a warm smile and a quick hug.

“Good to see you in one piece after yesterday.”

“And you.” She admired his new hand for a moment before looking around. “Is anyone else coming?”

“Don't think so,” He flexed his metal hand, now fixed from the damage it sustained yesterday, a shining new plate over the back. He picked up a beanbag from the basket, tossing it up “Oi, Purpled! Think fast.”

Purpled didn't even look, pulling out a knife from his belt, tossing it over his shoulder. It slammed into the bag mid-air, pinning it back against the wall with such force it sunk halfway in. Android whistled, yanking it out.

“You're getting better.”

“It's not like I can miss.” He pointed out, sending another one flying towards a target on the far side for good measure, not even checking the result.

“Hey, I can do that too!” Spark launched a dagger of fire at the wrecking ball hanging in the middle, leaving a dent and blackened scorch mark on the surface, joining many more.

“Watch out with the fire indoors.” Android cautioned. “I'd rather not be set on fire today.”

“Eh, you're fireproof.” Eryn tossed another dagger from hand to hand

“Only 63% fireproof!”

“The other 37% was useless anyway,” Tommy called over mockingly. Android's head snapped around.

“Oh, you little shit, come here.” He grabbed Tommy's arm, dragging him into a headlock, wrestling him playfully to loud shouts of protest. He wasn't really trying, letting Tommy wriggle free in his own time, though not without a few lessons about how to escape an actual chokehold. He trotted over to the benches, sitting down a suitable way away from Void, watching him play with a rubix cube.

He was humming a soft waltz to himself as he worked, an oddly familiar one, the colours falling into line under his fingers. Tommy narrowed his eyes at the figure suspiciously. “Wait a minute.” Void looked up, curious.

“What is it? What are we waiting for?” His voice and mannerisms snapped into place, and Tommy kicked himself mentally. He looked around quickly to make sure no one could overhear him, before dropping his voice.

“Hello Ranboob.”

The other meta nearly jumped out of his skin, spinning around. “What the...” His shoulders fell. “Ah. You.”

“Hullo.” Tommy said, scowling.

“You scared me.” He complained.

“Good, I meant to. You deserve it ya tall fuck.” Void’s mouth hung open.

“You know I don’t know how I didn’t notice you earlier, actually. You have a very unique personality.” He muttered to himself.

“What’s that supposed to mean?”

“It’s a compliment.” There was a note of sarcasm in the other meta’s voice. “Take it as one.” He laughed softly. “I feel kind of stupid.”

“Can’t imagine why that is.”

“Void, Theseus, partner up.” Android ordered. “We’re about to start.” Tommy immediately turned away, trying to find Spark but he wasn’t fast enough. Purpled grabbed onto Eryn’s arm, turning around with a smug grin. He turned back to Ranboo, annoyed.

“What? Were you trying to a-void me.”

Tommy stared at him. “Did you just...turn your own name into a pun.”

Void grinned. “Yes I did.”

“I hate you, I despise you.” He stepped back into a defensive pose. “You’re going down bitch.”

They circled each other slowly, Tommy seeking out a gap in the other boy’s defences, but he seemed prepared. That in mind, he decided to try another tactic, distract him until he slipped.

“So you’re the side apprentice.”

Void blinked. “Did you just imply that...”

“You’re the side chick? Yup.” He said, feeling pleased with himself

“I am not a side chick!”

Tommy was already barely holding back a grin. “Well yeah, you’re Tsunami’s second favourite apprentice.”

“Says who!”

“Says me.” He said smugly. “I’ve been training with her for nearly a year and a half, but I didn’t have a clue who you were before City Hall blew up.” He made a lunge forward, trying to catch him while he was distracted, but it was unsuccessful, the other boy was surprisingly fast, blocking the strike, pushing him back.

“I mean I know you,” Ranboo said, circling him slowly, relatively unphased.

“We don’t know each other.” he retorted. “I see you like once a week, swear at you and then avoid you until you’re gone.”

“I mean I’m sure that counts.” He said casually.

“No, it fucking doesn’t.” He evidently had enough. His hand shot out, grabbing the back of Tommy’s suit, fully picking him up, dangling his feet off the ground.

“Are you done?”

Tommy’s mouth dropped open. “You didn’t tell me you were cracked, this is unfair.” He whined.

“I will drop you,” Void said calmly, holding him at arm’s length

“I will drop kick you bitch.” He began to struggle, trying to yank himself free, lunging at his captor. The other boy looked amused.

“You can’t even reach me.”

“I.” Tommy paused, looking around as if more insults would just appear out of the walls. “I could tell them all I saw you doing ballet.”

“And?” Void tilted his head. “You’d be surprised how many heroes do dance, it’s a very good way of training a range of muscles that isn’t just constant fighting practice.”

“Alright nerd.”

“You’re just saying that because you can’t do it.”

“Well yeah,” Tommy admitted. “It looks kind of cool.” Void let him go, and he dropped to the floor with a strangled cry. “What the hell was that for.”

“Got you to admit it was cool.” He said, very pleased with himself. “You’ll never live that down.”

Tommy picked himself up, dusting himself off stiffly. “Shut up nerd.”

“What?”

“I said shut up nerd.”

“I have no idea what’s going on.” Void sat back, looking bewildered.

“Aha, I have confused you.” Tommy pointed a finger at him triumphantly. “You’re confused.”

“Uh. Yes. What does being a nerd have to do with dance?”

“Will you two stop bickering for a moment?” Tsunami appeared next to them, arms folded.

They sparred for a little while, back and forth, sometimes Tommy fought Void, sometimes they switched out fighting Tsunami, the other sitting out on the bench, catching their breath. By the end of it he was aching all over and exhausted, ribs aching from a particularly bad whack from a staff by Void, who’d apologised profusely afterward, though Tommy’s pride hurt more than anything.

“Alright, we’re done here,” Android called out. “Get cleaned up and get gone.”

“You heard him. Head out, I’ll see you in a bit.” She began to gather up their weapons.

“Don’t wanna patrol.” He grumbled

“Yeah, you’ve got it easy.” He complained. “Your patrol is way later.”

“I’m moving onto the evening patrol soon though.” Void told him. “I’m swapping with Android as he has night vision, so he’s taking my late-night route.”

“What if I just call a strike.” He threatened. “Can’t do anything to me then.”

Tsunami straightened up, trying to work out if he was serious. “Well, please don’t.”

“You didn’t let me have that octopus yesterday.”

“I don’t see how this is relevant.” She said patiently.

“I think it is.”

“You know what, go eat. I’ll deal with you later.” She waved him off, “And be nice to Void.”

The canteen was about halfway up the tower, pretty small, not much more than a small metal hatch and some preprepared trays with a few tables scattered around. Dinner was just a sandwiches and snacks, nothing high budget, but still good, high-energy food.

"Heyyy." Tommy strolled over to the other two, Void in tow.

“Hey! Blaze said you saw the Syndicate. That’s so fucking cool.” Eryn skirted closer. “What was it like?”

“I saw them too.” Void chimed in.

“Shut up late shift kid.” Purpled slid down onto the bench, setting his tray down. “Nobody asked.”

Void took a step back, hurt flickering in his eyes, but Tommy chose to ignore it. “It was terrifying, but I tackled Achilles myself.” he boasted. “I threw a rock at his head, .”

“Have they worked out why he was there yet?”

Eryn looked at a morning newspaper on a rack nearby. “The new deaths. I bet that’s why he was out, getting rid of them.” A chill ran down Tommy’s spine, an odd silence falling over the table.

“The Syndicate are awful.” Void broke it quietly

“No shit.” Eryn’s tone was dry. “You don’t say.”

“I mean they tried to blow up Schlatt,” Purpled joked. “Maybe they don’t have the wrong idea.”

“Purpled they literally kill us!” Spark exclaimed, surprised. He snatched the newspaper off the rack, brandishing it at him so he could see the headline. “Look!”

Purpled scrunched up his face. “Yeah well, that aside.”

“Yeah, the rampant murder of other metas side.” Spark sat himself down with a smirk. “That seems like a fair thing to brush over.”

Tommy moved to sit down, and Void hesitated. “What is it?” He asked irritably.

“I kind of have this.” He explained, pointing to the mask over his nose and mouth. “So I can’t really eat in the canteen without outing my identity.”

“Oh.” He felt an odd curl of pity for the other meta. “We can go sit somewhere else?”

“You don’t want to stay with the others?” Ranboo asked, surprised

“Don’t like any of them anyway,” Tommy muttered, already half regretting it, but Tsunami had told him to be nice to him

“I know a place.” Void volunteered. “We just can’t get caught.”

Tommy lit up immediately. “Sounds great.”

Ranboo led them to a sheltered corner of the training room, stacking the mats up in front of them, pulling them around to make a little hollow against the wall to sit in. He pulled the mask away with a sigh of relief, sitting down.

“You look weird,” Tommy said immediately, through a mouthful of sandwich. It was odd, seeing a familiar face on what he’d assumed were two different people, even though he’d guessed his identity the confirmation was strange.

“Oh for goodness sake. You’ve seen me plenty of times.” Tommy watched him for a few minutes, thoughtful. “I feel uncomfortable. What are you planning?”

“Soooo when did you join the Tower?”

He pulled a face. “Like? Two months ago? I don’t remember.”

“Why didn’t you get announced or anything?” He asked curiously. Ranboo looked guilty

“Well I lied about my age, so they put me on normal night patrol, and then found out, so I asked to be put with Tsunami.”

Tommy nearly spat his food out. “You did what?”

Ranboo waved his hands. “No, wait, wait. I didn’t mean to, I just didn’t know how old I was so I took a guess.”

“You didn’t know how old you were?” Tommy stared at him. “How do you not know how old you are.”

“Uh.” He hesitated for a moment. “It’s kind of complicated.”

“Go on.” Tommy urged him. “I’ll make you tell me sooner or later.”

He looked down at his lunchbox. “I don’t really remember much of that. The Warden thinks my ability might have damaged my memory slightly, I think I just have bad short-term memory anyway.”

“Your ability damaged your memory?”

Ranboo nodded, taking another bite of his sandwich. “They don’t really know how my teleporting works, neither do I, they think if I overdo it it can impact my memory because I’m basically

transporting all the cells in my body through space and time, and while that works perfectly most of the time, it can mess up now and then.”

Tommy sniggered. “So what you’re saying is, this job makes you lose brain cells.”

“Pretty much!”

“Join the club man.”

“So if I look confused or say weird stuff, or look lost, it’s not my fault.”

“I’ll tell you if I ever notice a difference.”

“Oh haha.” Ranboo rolled his eyes,

Tommy waited for him to finish eating before resuming his interrogation, having already scarfed his food down in about five minutes flat. “So why, didn’t they put you with someone else?”

“I asked to go with Tsunami,” Ranboo explained. “Cos I already knew her.”

“How did you how did you know it was Niki?” He pressed. “Cos I bet she never told you.”

“Found out by accident. She spilled some water on the floor and didn’t realise I was in the doorway when she picked it up with her powers and put it in the sink.” He grinned. “You should have seen the look on her face.”

"She must have been so mad, she's always so careful."

"How did you know?" Ranboo asked. "I didn’t actually realise you knew her real identity until I put together who you were, she never said why you came around sometimes in the afternoon so I just assumed she was teaching you as well or something but you said you didn’t do dance."

He shrugged. “She’s friends with my mum, and we’ve kind of been a team for about a year and a half.” He said, a little smug. “A year of that on active patrol, it’s kind of hard to hide for that long.”

Void fixed him with a look. “I get it, you’ve known each other for a while.”

“I wasn’t going to say anything else!”

The suspicion didn’t leave the other meta’s expression. “After the side chick comment earlier I refuse to believe anything you say.”

Tommy opened his mouth to fight that but then backed down. “You know what. Fair. Fair enough.”

“Oh, and we should probably head back.” Void added. Tommy glanced down at his watch and then swore, jumping to his feet. “We need to put the mats back.”

“Eh.” Tommy shrugged. “Leave ‘em, they’ll never know.”

“I mean if you’re sure.” Void said hesitantly, pulling his mask back up. They clambered back over the top of the pile, shoving them to the side a little. Tommy took lookout, checking left and right before waving Void out of the hall, hurrying down the stairs before they were spotted.

The Captain caught his arm right outside the canteen, dropping her voice. “There you are. The Warden wants to speak to you.”

“Wha-, now?”

“Preferably.”

“Am I in trouble?”

“Is there a reason to be?” She asked pointedly. He wisely chose not to say anything, turning to the other meta.

“Hey, can you take my tray back?” He asked hopefully. Ranboo took it without complaint.

“I’ll tell Tsunami you’ll be late.” He offered.

“Thanks.”

“Come on.” She trotted off, and he hurried after her, back up the stairs. The Warden’s office was near the top of the building, down a long, carpeted corridor in the most restricted area of the Tower other than the basement, though he’d never really been there, there wasn’t usually a need for it. The Captain strode ahead, slowing outside the door, knocking carefully.

“Come in!”

It was simple, functional, everything neatly tidied away. The walls were filled with screens, showing security footage from all over the tower, lines of code, pages of statistics and numbers he couldn’t even begin to grasp, technology far beyond most of what he’d ever seen. The Warden stood by the window, looking out over the city. Tommy crept in, the Captain shutting the door behind them.

“You wanted to talk to me?” He inclined his head, not looking back. “Is this about yesterday?”

“Somewhat. It’s about the City Hall incident.” Tommy chewed his lip, waiting, hands clasped behind his back. “We’ve eliminated all possible suspects in the staff there, and it had to be someone there, forensics of what remained of the device used showed it had to be triggered from close quarters.”

“So who did it?”

He turned slowly, leaning on his trident “This doesn’t go any further than us, understood.” Tommy nodded quickly. “According to law enforcement, it means we may be facing the possibility of an infiltration of some kind.”

The breath rushed out of his chest. “You’re not serious, are you?”

His expression never shifted. “That’s what we’re going to find out. How much do you know about Void?”

“That’s impossible,” Tommy said immediately. “If you’re saying what I think you’re saying, he was with me the entire time.”

The Warden sat back, raising an eyebrow. “Is that so?”

“He didn’t know what was happening, I was the one trying to go in and he was sticking to protocol because neither of us knew if there’d be more. Plus he’s incapable of placing a bomb.” Tommy said with full certainty.

“Interesting.” The Warden sat back. Tommy waited for a few moments, trying to work him out. “I believe you. I didn’t think so either.”

“Then why did you ask?”

“I was curious how you were getting on with him.” He made a note on his screen. “With his move onto an earlier shift you’ll be working together more.”

“You could have just asked me how I was getting on with him.” He argued. “Rather than giving me a heart attack.

“I also wanted to clear you too.”

Tommy was dumbfounded, mouth hanging open for a few moments. “You think I’d...”

“No, not really. But officially we have to clear all of you.” The Captain explained. “Our equipment shows that none of our agents were anywhere close to where it was placed, at any point. And I know nobody here would, but the authorities insisted.” She shared an unreadable look with the Warden.

“So I can go?” He asked hopefully

“You can go.” She confirmed. “Send Spark up when you find him. And don’t tell him anything.”

“Got it.” He let himself out as quickly as possible, relief flooding over him, trotting off with a spring in his step to find Eryn.

Chapter End Notes

1 :)

I love writing Mumza and Tommy, their dynamic is one of my favourites, it's just chaotic child and hard-working mum who will do anything for her son and just wants to see him happy.

Also this fic is nearly at 100 kudos and its only been just over a week since I posted it so thank you for that! It really means a lot to me

Chapter 12

Chapter Summary

“You’re one of the strongest metas in the Tower.” He pointed out. “And you’ve been after the Syndicate for years, you’re one of the only people who can actually give Achilles a fair fight, you’re probably a big threat to whatever the Syndicate is working towards right now.”

“Let’s talk about something less serious.” She proposed. “Being tired and miserable is no fun.”
“Alright, did you know that cows are colourblind?”

Chapter Notes

double update pog, though it's a slightly shorter chapter

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

The other apprentices were all sitting in the canteen, Purpled getting ready to go home, having been on the morning shift, chatting with Eryn animatedly about something.

“Heyyy Spark.” Tommy slid over next to them. “The Warden wants to see you.”

He sat up, alarmed. “He what?”

“He wants to see you.” Tommy smiled at him innocently. “I heard you might be in big trouble.”

Spark glared right back. “You’d better not be messing with me right now.”

“I’m not.” He pointed at the Captain, who was waiting in the doorway. “Go ask her.” The other boy picked himself up, muttering to himself, and Void watched him go.

“Is he actually in trouble?”

“Probably not,” Tommy told him cheerfully. “Hopefully not, otherwise things are going to get real awkward real fast.”

“Why’s that?”

“Can’t tell you, Warden’s orders.” Void folded his arms.

“You’re really annoying, you know that right?”

“It’s part of my charm.” He hopped up. “Anyway, I’m out. See y’all later.” He took the elevator down to the lobby, pacing, waiting for Tsunami to join him.

He floated a pencil up into the air a little, bored, drifting around aimlessly, drawing crude pictures in the thick dust up in the nooks and crannies the cleaners couldn’t reach. They joined a collection of

little items, stolen pens, erasers, a hairband, Sparks watch, and a few other things he'd hidden up there just to see if anyone ever noticed.

"No powers in the lobby!" Jack called out as he went past. Tommy stuck his tongue out at him, but settled back down, waiting. Spark came down the stairs after a few minutes, pointing an accusing finger at him.

"You're a fucking dickhead, you know that right." He hissed, without too much real venom

"Don't speak to your peers like that." The Warden followed him down. "And Theseus, that was unfair of you."

"In my defence." He protested. "I only said he might be in trouble, which was true."

"I believe you were told not to tell him anything." He wasn't taking any of Tommy's nonsense, to Spark's great amusement. "Which was important to maintain the integrity of our investigation."

"I didn't." Tommy tried to defend himself. "It's Spark, he could be in trouble for anything. He literally set the changing rooms on fire two months ago."

The Warden turned an accusing gaze on Spark. "As I recall, you told me that was an accident."

"It was! And it was also kind of Theseus's fault."

"I mean one of us is a pyromaniac here and it's not me." Tommy teased. Spark gave him the middle finger, refusing to grace that with a reply, disappearing into said changing rooms which had long been refurbished. The fire wasn't even that bad anyway, a small scorch mark on one of the lockers and the faint lingering hint of smoke all that was left behind. All in all, regular risks of being around other metas.

"Ready for patrol?" Niki popped up next to him and he jumped, badly.

"Stop fucking doing that!" She giggled, only looking a little remorseful.

"I'm sorry, it was too easy."

"I'm having a bad influence on you; I know it." Her eyes sparkled.

"Or maybe this is just me, you'll never know. So, are you ready to go?"

"Ready to kick ass." He agreed cheerfully

"I don't think we'll be doing much of that. It'll be a quiet patrol tonight."

"No Syndicate?" He said hopefully

"I can't make any promises."

The Warden glanced up. "Did you see my message? I assigned you District 13."

"I did but I have a student with me, so no." She said firmly. "It's too dangerous, we're taking District 8. It's right next to our usual 7 patrol."

"You have orders."

“I’ve exchanged with Foxtrot.” She replied. “I’m taking his district and he’s taking mine, we’ve notified the dispatchers, it’s all been sorted.”

“I don’t appreciate you making these decisions without my approval.” He said pointedly.

“Unless you’re planning to give Theseus the pay and insurance of a full hero, don’t ask him to do the job of one. I refuse to take a pupil into a dangerous district so soon after what happened yesterday.”

“Then inform me of that decision instead of going behind my back.” He said, a warning note in his voice. “If I were feeling less kind today, I would make you switch back and consult me in future.”

“Warden, one of us is going to have to back down here, and it’s not going to be me.”

“Do we have to argue over this every time?” He folded his arms.

“Yes.” She put her hands on her hips, staring him down, even as he towered two feet over her. “I will protect the boys even if you don’t have the guts to.”

“Get him!” Tommy cheered, earning himself a frosty stare.

“It’s all sorted.” Niki continued. “I wasn’t asking for permission; I’m telling you this is what’s happening.” He sighed, letting a slight smile slip through.

“Fine, just this once.”

Her eyes sparkled with amusement. “You almost always say that.”

“You’re one of the most hardworking metas we have.” He said, a little amused. “I’m sure I can let you off once or twice. Go on, don’t let me keep you.” She motioned for Tommy to follow her before he could change his mind, walking out onto the street.

“Are you alright?” He asked once they were through the doors. “That was pretty harsh.” She nodded wearily.

“Just been working all day, at the end of my tether, I’m sorry you had to see that.”

“That was badass.”

“That was me getting angry.” She corrected. “I don’t like people seeing that.”

“You’re the politest angry person I’ve seen.” He pointed out. “I prefer to just shout at people. Or punch them, that works too.”

“Could you imagine if I punched the Warden?” She said, aghast, “I’d feel awful.”

“He’d deserve it,” Tommy muttered. “Being a bitch like that.”

“He’s just doing his job, at the end of the day,” she smiled wryly. “I don’t envy him one bit.”

“How was everyone after the fight yesterday?” He jumped over a drain, using his powers to boost himself up in the air a little, able to play with them now he was out of Android’s line of sight.

“We got lucky. Blaze has some scratches, Jack had a few screws loose but that was the worst of it, and it’s all fixed now.”

“See when I say he has a screw loose it’s rude but when you say it it’s fine!” Tommy threw his hands up in protest. “This is fucking rude. This is discrimination.”

“Don’t throw words around,” she chided. “When I say it, I mean it’s a medical issue, when you say it, you’re being a nuisance.”

“I can’t believe this,” he muttered. “This is so unfair.” She managed a half-smile at his antics, but not much more, looking exhausted.

“Are you alright?” He sobered slightly, concerned. She dismissed him with a wave of her hand.

“Just tired.”

“You’re working too hard.”

“They needed people to fill up shifts.”

“When did you last sleep?” He gave her a proper look over for the first time that evening, taking in the weary expression she wore. She was moving stiffly, some kind of untreated injury on her leg. “I guess I should tell Ranboo dance lessons are off.”

“Ssh,” she waved her hand in a warning. “No names on patrol.”

“Oh shit,” he looked around guiltily to see if anyone had heard, even though they were now on an empty rooftop.

“I probably do it anyway, I just won’t dance as much, I’ll let him do most of it,” she explained.

“Wouldn’t you want a rest?”

“I like to dance. We all have our ways of escaping, Void likes to go on walks, you in your bookshop, and for me, I dance. It just gets us away from it all for a while, and after the week I’ve had I could do with getting away.”

“Any idea where Achilles went after the fight?” Her expression soured.

“No. Unfortunately not, he disappeared, as he always does. Jack was searching CCTV for hours last night but we didn’t find anything at all. We don’t even know why they targeted me.”

“You’re one of the strongest metas in the Tower.” He pointed out. “And you’ve been after the Syndicate for years, you’re one of the only people who can actually give Achilles a fair fight, you’re probably a big threat to whatever the Syndicate is working towards right now.”

“Let’s talk about something less serious.” She proposed. “Being tired and miserable is no fun.”

“Alright, did you know that cows are colourblind?”

She began to laugh. “No, actually. Why was that the first thing that came to mind?”

“Got some solid cow facts,” he declared sagely. “Want more?”

“Sure.”

They headed up through the shopping district, Tommy balancing along the curb, not paying much attention, rambling away about training and Void and anything else that came to his mind as he usually did. The skyscrapers were covered with large, flickering screens, casting technicolour shadows across the empty road, faces of heroes flashing by, complete with splash text and popping animations, cut in with advertisements. There was an eerie quiet that came with the evening, the images moving soundlessly across the walls, a soft wind drifting down the streets, voices echoing off the buildings. In the distance there were car horns and pumping nightclub music but here it was quiet, most of the commuters already home, no one else really out and about on a Tuesday night other than the odd figure now and then, each absorbed into their own little world.

Niki had found a stray cat up ahead, kneeling down on the sidewalk, cooing at it happily, stroking its ears. "Theseus look!"

"I can see," he said, amused. "You always find at least one." Niki laughed at that, picking the cat up, the ragged tough looking stray purring happily in her arms.

"You know day it'll be you up there," She said with a hint of pride, looking up at the screens, an image of Blaze vanishing, replaced by a silent newsreel, the reporter describing something in an animated way, the subtitles not really visible from their angle.

"You think so?"

"I know so." She pulled a face at something only she could see. "I hated it. I had to pose all day in this stupid green screen suit because they didn't feel that my suit came out well enough on the cameras. I felt ridiculous."

"I won't have to do that," he said smugly. "I look too fabulous."

"If you say so."

"Oi!" They settled into their usual rhythm, light conversation flowing easily as they headed down the hill, walking under the overpass. An odd feeling crawled down Tommy's spine as they emerged from the shadows. He felt watched, eyes burning into the back of his neck but when he turned, there was no one there. By the time he looked back, Tsunami had made some distance ahead of him, and he had to run to keep up, the feeling all but slipping from his mind.

They turned towards the river, walking down the footpath. Niki indulged his pestering to show her powers off, bringing up water spouts from the surface, sending them racing across to the other side, or little waves, watching the ripples shatter the reflection of the sky, cast in all shades of red and auburn with the last of the setting sun. It was normal, the same route they'd walked many times before, the familiarity comforting.

Then the odd feeling came back again. She'd taught him early on to listen to his gut, and he listened now, drawing to a halt. "Something's not right."

Tsunami nodded slowly. "I was thinking the same."

"What do we do?"

"Stay close to me. If I give the word, run." He shivered, uncomfortable. "We'll be on the streets again in a minute." She reassured him. "I'm sure it's nothing."

He nodded, sticking close behind her as they turned another corner, passing an old warehouse. The path back up onto the road was just ahead, under another footbridge, Niki striding ahead, eager to get back to

“ Stay still. Don’t say a word .” A soft whisper brushed past him. He found himself frozen mid-step, unable to cry out, or get Niki’s attention in any way, an odd compulsion locking him in place as she walked ahead.

He saw her turn first, confused. Then he saw the moment fear entered her eyes, raw and desperate, lunging towards him. A hand closed over his mouth, and he saw her fall, unable to scream or do anything to save her.

He woke on the ground, a horrible, hollow feeling in his stomach. It was dark, he was lying on a concrete floor, the cold seeping into his bones, alone. Something was missing, something felt empty.

He was aching, pain flashing across his arm. There was blood on his hands, he didn’t know whose it was. His vision was blurring, he could barely see where he was going, but some instinct, buried deep within him told him to run. He booked it, stumbling over sidewalks, crashing into bins, dazed.

It wasn’t fast enough. He pushed himself up into the air, burning up his power recklessly, hurtling towards the tower on the hill, the wind stinging his eyes. He fell to the ground outside, his ankle landing under him strangely, but he didn’t feel the pain, stumbling inside.

“Warden!”

“Theseus! What are you doing here?” Hands grabbed him, holding him up, it sounded kind of like Android, but he couldn’t sure

“Please. I need help.” He begged, reaching out for the newcomer blindly.

“What’s the matter?”

“Where’s the Warden, I need the Warden.” There was a pause as Android relayed something across his earpiece

“He’s on his way. Tell me what happened, I’ll fill him in.”

“They came back. They came back.” He whispered, running feet coming closer, alerted by the shouting.

“Who did? Who came back?” He pressed. “Tell me.”

“The Syndicate.” He felt the hush fall, but he couldn’t see it. Flashes shot past his eyes, fractured memories, little more than flickering images, a fist, a knife, struggling against a hold he couldn’t break, the image of a bleached white opera mask hovering over it all. He began to shake, curling up into a ball.

“Theseus?” It all sped up. The whispering of the unfamiliar voice, the hand closing over his mouth, a woman’s voice yelling at him to run, screaming. The way she fell to the ground replaying in his head, almost in slow motion.

“No. No.” He shook his head. “No.”

“Theseus? Where is Tsunami?” Android demanded. "Where is she?"

“They came back for her. She's gone." His voice cracked

"What do you mean she's gone? They took her?"

"They killed her."

Chapter End Notes

0 :)

Damn this Niki person seems nice, would be a shame if someone were to *gunshots*
Whoops, my hand slipped. Anyway, that’s the end of the first arc, ominous countdown is now over

Fun fact, this chapter is actually the bit the entire story is built around so I'm pretty nervous about posting it, I just came up with it one day and thought, hey, that’s angsty, I could make a fic out of this. So I did.

Edit: We have a discord now! - [Join the Discord](#)

Join for theories, updates, my rambling, funny memes, and writing advice

Chapter 13

Chapter Summary

“All staff stand by for orders, we have a code red, possible code black, I repeat, we have a code red, possible code black.” The Captain’s voice came over both their earpieces, and they slowed. Something seemed to shift in Jack’s expression, the reality of the situation setting in slowly. “All agents abandon patrols and focus on combing District 8 for any sign of Tsunami or the Syndicate.”

Chapter Notes

100 kudos update pog, thanks for all the support! I love reading all your comments, it makes my day

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

The world was spinning around him, voices echoed in his ears, people were shouting at him, nothing was making sense.

“Enough!” It was rare for the Warden to raise his voice, but he did it now. The effect was instant, silence falling. “Give him space.”

“What’s happening,” Tommy whispered. “How did I get here?” His head was aching, blood rushing in his ears. A dark figure appeared above him, kneeling down.

“Don’t you remember?” All he got in return was an empty stare. “Android said you ran in, saying the Syndicate had come back, asking for my help.”

Tommy curled up tighter, and an armoured hand settled on his wrist. “Tell me what you know.”

“She’s dead, I saw her body, I don’t remember anything.” He was starting to hyperventilate, one hand pressed to his chest, doubled over.

“I need you to breathe.” The Warden ordered. “Three counts in, two counts out. Now.”

“I can’t. I can’t.”

“That was an order.” He snapped. Tommy acted on instinct, taking a sharp breath in, his eyes too wide, but seeing nothing. “Where is she now?”

“I don’t know, I woke up, I was on my own, I couldn’t see her.” He was trying so hard to control his breathing, but the more he thought about it the more it slipped out of his control.

“Where’s your communicator.” Tommy looked down at his wrist. The device was gone, scratch marks on his arm like it had been ripped off.

“I don’t know.”

“Where were you. What happened?”

“I don’t know. I woke up on the floor, I think Orpheus was there, he was gone when I woke up. I don’t know.” The Warden took his hands, studying them. The blood was still on them, he didn’t remember how it got there.

“How long ago was this?”

“I don’t know.” He whispered. “Please, I don’t know.”

“Give us something!” Someone called out, he dimly recognised Android. The Warden flicked a device out of his belt, shining a light into Tommy’s eyes for a second. He didn’t even react, staring into the distance.

“Disorientated, dilated pupils, symptoms of shock, lack of memory.” He said grimly. “This is Orpheus’s work.” He stood up. “Get him to the med bay. Treat him for shock, make sure he’s not hurt anywhere else.”

“He’s bleeding,” Android reported. He lifted Tommy’s arm, studying a cut, blood running down his wrist to his hand. The cyborg slipped an arm under his shoulder, helping him up. He stopped suddenly, taking Tommy’s chin, pushing it up, revealing a red mark across it. “Held at knifepoint.”

“Theseus is there anything else you can tell us?” Tommy shook his head mutely. “Alright, get him somewhere safe.”

Hands lifted him up, leading him forward, and he tried to struggle instinctively. “Stop fighting me kid,” Jack said in his ear. “Not the time.”

“All staff stand by for orders, we have a code red, possible code black, I repeat, we have a code red, possible code black.” The Captain’s voice came over both their earpieces, and they slowed. Something seemed to shift in Jack’s expression, the reality setting in slowly. “All agents abandon patrols and focus on combing District 8 for any sign of Tsunami or the Syndicate.”

He reached over, taking out Tommy’s earpiece. “Maybe not right now.” Tommy protested weakly, but there wasn’t much he could do as Jack led him into the med bay. The bright lights stung his eyes, but he didn’t feel able to look away. There was a pattering of feet, and Supreme appeared next to him alarmed. Voices flew over his head, and he was sat down on a bed, a cup of water pressed into his hand gently.

“Ponk, where is he?” Puffy strode in, spotting him, rushing over. “Oh hey.”

“Hi.” He managed.

The healer tilted his head up gently, running a finger over the cut on his throat, and an odd warm sensation crawled over it, the pain vanishing. “There.” He studied the wound on his arm. “We’re just going to patch that up for now.” They said quietly. “I’ll sort it out properly when this is done.”

“It should be healed.” The Captain looked worried. “It’s not good.”

“Ideally,” Supreme said, chewing his lip. “But I’m hoping I have someone else to heal after him, and we don’t know how bad it’s gonna be.” She accepted that without another word, one hand on Tommy’s shoulder as Ponk cleaned it out quickly, placing the dressing and bandaging it, quick and

gentle, sitting him down on a bed. He let himself be guided around, oddly docile, his thoughts caught in a weird fog.

“You’re not normally this agreeable,” Android noted, trying to make a joke but it fell pretty flat.

“After effects of Orpheus.” Ponk said bitterly. She carried over a glass of water, sitting down next to him. “Seen it before.”

“It’s probably a good thing,” Puffy said sadly. “Or he’d probably hurt himself.”

“I can still hear you.” Tommy mumbled.

Ponk sat up suddenly, eyes wide, and Puffy mirrored him, head leant to one side as they listened to a voice in their earpieces.

“What’s happening?” Tommy asked blearily.

“You a bit more awake?” She asked softly, avoiding the question.

“A bit, what’s happening?”

“I don’t know if…” She trailed off

“I want to know.” He demanded. “Please, I have to know.”

“They’ve found something.” Supreme interrupted, before she got another chance to speak. The captain gave them a disapproving look, but he just shook his head. “Nah he’s right, he’s gotta know.”

Tommy sat up abruptly, wincing as his head spun. “Please.”

“He just went through something traumatic.” The Captain protested. “He needs to rest.”

“No, he’s still going through it.” Ponk corrected. “It won’t get better until he gets his answers.”

“I don’t know if that’s the best idea.”

“I’m the medic.” They said flatly. “If you don’t take him up, I will.”

“I’ll do it.” She guided him out, taking the elevator up, pushing the door to the meeting room open. Eyes followed him all the way in, but the Warden made no comment. The door opened again, revealing a tiny dark-haired woman, in a red dress, a red mask over her eyes, delicate dragonfly wings hanging on her back. One was covered with some kind of odd gauzy material, and she was very protective of it, half-turned away from the room.

“Rose you’re supposed to be on bed rest,”

“I’m fine.” She said abruptly. “This is more important.” She made direct eye contact with the Warden, daring him to argue, but he let it slide.

“I’m glad you’re up and about.”

Foxtrot walked in behind her, out of breath, eyes fixed on the floor, looking nervous. The Warden leaned on his trident. “Spit it out. What have you found?”

The fox hybrid stepped forward, head down, setting an object in a small plastic bag down on the table. Tsunami's communicator, shattered, covered in blood. The air in the room ran cold, a sudden stillness falling.

"We found Theseus's as well, but it was in worse condition, there's nothing left we can get from it."

"Where did you find it?"

"By the river path, there's signs of a struggle, Blaze is still there. The lab is running tests now to confirm." Foxtrot reported.

"I'm retrieving the data from her smartwatch." Android reported grimly, studying the screen in his wrist. "Her vitals spiked, about an hour ago, and then flatline. But she might have just taken it off."

"Theseus is very adamant he saw a body." The Warden said, his voice flat

"He might not remember correctly." Foxtrot tried to stay hopeful, but it wasn't much use.

"I'm afraid it's one of the few things he remembers clearly."

"What else does he remember?" He pressed. "There has to be something."

Tommy shook his head mutely as the Warden looked at him. "Even if he does, he won't be able to say anything about what happened beyond what he's told us. Orpheus makes sure of that."

"What was Orpheus doing out there?"

"We know Achilles was also there, as Theseus has injuries that align with his weapons," Supreme reported, shutting the door behind her as she came in. "And Orpheus isn't a weapon kinda guy."

"We have no information." Punz cut in. "Why the hell are we making assumptions. We need actual proof."

"Punz is right, we're jumping to conclusions. We find Tsunami and then we start putting the pieces together." The Captain tried to reason

"And, if we don't?" He asked. Foxtrot hissed at him, drawing his lips back to show curved fangs, earning himself a glare in return. "I'm just saying. Orpheus doesn't leave people alive to run away, he clearly wanted to send a message. The blood, the broken communicator, we have to be honest with ourselves, it's not looking good."

"Blaze says he's about to make things worse." Ponk told Tommy quietly, tapping their earpiece. "I think he could have put it a better way, to be honest." She paled quietly but continued anyway. "He's found bullet casing next to the site."

"Police are about to arrive on the scene." The Warden relayed to him. "Don't touch it, let them do the proper forensics, we have what we need."

"Speaking of." Android sat forward, drawing their attention with a raised hand. "The lab results are back. It's her blood."

Tommy's breath hiked. "Theseus?" Ponk asked gently. "Do you want to step outside?"

"I'm fine." He replied automatically.

“Of course he is.” Punz spat. “Tsunami’s gone and he’s here and safe and fine.”

“Do not take your grief out on him.” The Warden’s tone switched, turning dangerous. “He didn’t stand a chance against the Syndicate, and if they left him alive, he had no choice in it. And for the record, he’s not only injured, but there are also signs he put up a struggle, even if he doesn’t remember it.”

“They could have killed him in a heartbeat, they left him alive to send a message.” Android said bitterly. “I know Orpheus, if he wanted to, he could remove the whole event from memory, he chose to let him remember, chose to let him warn us.”

“Too late.” The Captain put her head in her hands. “He let us know when it was too late, he’s taunting us. And he used a teenager to do it.”

“If I see him, I’ll wrap my hands around his throat myself,” Android swore, fists clenched

“If you see him, you’ll notify us immediately.” The Warden corrected. “In fact, you won’t be seeing him, I’m transferring you down to the labs

“But....”

“No arguments, I don’t trust you on the street. You’ll work on evidence for the case, you’ll be more useful there.” The Warden ordered. “And I’d better not hear another word out of any you against Theseus, for any reason, he’s hurt too.” He turned abruptly. “Enough of this. I want every active hero on deck, send search parties across the city for any trace of what they did with her before the trails go cold. All of you, get out there, and keep me updated on everything that happens.”

They filed out silently, and the Captain hurried over to Tommy, kneeling down next to him. “Hey. Can you talk to me?” He shook his head mutely. She sat back, waving to get the Warden’s attention. “He’s shaking. We need to get him home.”

“There is an active investigation.” The Warden reminded her.

“He’s a kid.” Supreme agreed with her. “He has told you all he can, you have his equipment, you have everything we can get data of off.”

“This is wrong. This is all wrong.” Tommy whispered, staring at the tiny plastic bag on the table.

“It’s okay.” She moved closer, rubbing gentle circles on his back. “It’s alright, you’re safe.”

“It was a good day. I had a good day. It was quiet, it was so quiet.” He said numbly. “We were just talking and the sun was setting and then....and now it’s dark and she’s gone and I don’t remember anything.”

“You’re alright, you’re safe, it’s not your fault,” She gave the Warden a look, something like I told you so. “I’m taking him home.”

“He’s about to panic.” Android warned, almost sounding bored.

“Then help me.” A hand settled on his forehead, and he suddenly felt so tired, his arms so heavy he couldn’t stand, eyes sliding shut.

He woke back home, lying on his couch. For a moment it was all normal, and then reality slammed him in the chest, leaving him no air to breathe.

“Tommy!” He heard the rattle of keys, and thuds of items being dropped without care. The door opened. I came as soon as I heard.” Kristin sat down by his bed. “I’m so sorry. She held her arms out, and he fell into them, unable to hold himself up any longer, breaking down completely

Chapter End Notes

holds up WHIT!Tommy Damn this boy can fit so much trauma into it.
I promised mumza wouldn’t die, I made no promises for anyone else, don’t get mad at me

[Join the Discord](#)

Also bruh, y’all can’t act surprised after I had Niki tell Tommy she was proud of him and discuss what she’d do if she ever had a future of her own, I made it so obvious she was about to be out of the picture

Chapter 14

Chapter Summary

"It hasn't hit me yet." Ranboo said quietly. "I wasn't there like you were. I think that's why everyone's still holding out, because it's Tsunami, if anyone could survive, it was her, and also we never thought it would happen."

"Heroes die, not ours though. People go missing, not my friends though. Bodies get washed up in the river all the time, it was never going to be us." Tommy poured himself a glass mechanically. "Until it was."

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

She never left him. Not when he cried himself almost to sleep, not when the tears dried up, his shoulders heavily empty, late into the night. Not when the call came through taking him off duty for two weeks, banning him from the searches.

He wasn't allowed to leave, he tried. Police were stationed at every door, eyes on the windows. His communicator was gone, smashed up, and Jack had taken his earpiece, so he had no way of knowing what was happening.

He stayed in bed all of that awful day, waiting for news, clutching onto his phone, refreshing the news with an almost feverish intensity, waiting for a text, a call, anything to stop the waiting. The Captain stopped by, once, to see how he was getting on, and he tried to plead his case to help, but she wouldn't hear it, promising he'd be told as soon as there was news.

There was a knock on the door on the third day. He tried to ignore it, but it came again, more insistent. He pulled himself up, dragging his feet on the carpet as if they'd go if he took long enough, afraid of what he'd find.

He opened the door slowly, before seeing who was outside and pushing it wide open. Ranboo's eyes were swollen and red, "I'm sorry I..." Tommy stepped aside wordlessly, letting him in.

"I would have texted you to say I was coming but I didn't have your number or anything and i..."

"It's fine," Tommy replied, abrupt. "What is it?"

"I'm not good at this." He whispered. "Why did they send me."

He looked up sharply. "Did they...."

"No. Not exactly." He hesitated. "They found her mask. It washed up downstream."

"They..." Tommy trailed off. The last spark of hope shriveled up and died in his chest, turning blackened and cold. He slumped forward, burying his head in his hands.

“It’s not a body,” Ranboo said, still trying to be optimistic

“It’s a mask. Heroes don’t give their masks away, she’s dead, or she’s dying and they have her, and I don’t know which is worse.” He whispered.

“I’m so sorry.”

“Don’t fucking apologise. Everyone’s suddenly apologising.”

“I mean. With me you could argue it wasn’t sudden.” He pointed out. “If you know me it’s kind of my thing.” Tommy hummed, not really listening. Ranboo wrung his hands. “I don’t know what else to say. I know it doesn’t help but I want to say something. She was my mentor too.”

“I know.” Tommy took a deep breath. “I mean. I knew it could happen I just...”

“It wasn’t going to be us.” Ranboo finished for him. “It could happen, but it’ll never happen to you. Well, until it does.”

He nodded mutely. Ranboo took a deep breath, looking like he was trying to hype himself up to ask something. “Go on?” Tommy prompted

“Do you mind if I stay? It’s just, I live on my own, and waiting for news on your own is just...”

Tommy hesitated, and then nodded, leading him into the kitchen.

“Are you alright?” He asked cautiously.

Tommy stared at the wall. “What if they come after us next?”

“The Syndicate?” Ranboo asked, before wincing. “Wait stupid question.”

“We don’t know why they did it, what if we’re next.” He sat down on a chair, a thousand miles away.

“I guess, if they wanted you dead, they would have done it?” He reasoned, sounding unsure.

“I wish they did.”

“Tommy!” Ranboo’s head shot up. “Wha-.”

“I feel so fucking helpless. They killed her and they left me and I can’t do anything.” The other boy was speechless for a few moments, before shifting closer awkwardly.

“It wasn’t your fault.”

“Why her?” He mumbled through his hands.

“If you want the honest answer...”

“Just fucking be honest.” Tommy cut in. “I don’t care, how much worse can it get.”

He mulled it over for a few moments, before sitting forward. "I don't know exactly how to say this but, I overheard the Warden say he thinks they were hunting her."

"What do you mean?"

Ranboo's brow furrowed, trying to remember. "He said, the Syndicate doesn't show their faces, rarely ever, that many clashes in one week, in places they didn't need to be, the only common factor between all of them was Tsunami, he sounded annoyed though so I didn't stay around to listen in case he caught me."

Tommy's eyes widened. "No, he's right. He's right." He rubbed his eyes,

"Speaking of the Warden," Ranboo said carefully, watching Tommy carefully for his reaction. "He's kind of why I'm here. He assigned me to guard duty."

"Guard? Duty?"

"Basically, to keep an eye on you until we know the Syndicate aren't coming back for you. I know you don't really like me." He continued. "And we don't know each other that well, but it was me or Rose, and I don't know, I'm not allowed on the searches so I wanted to do something to help and I..."

"It's fine." Tommy cut his rambling off. It wasn't fine, but he didn't have the energy to argue

"You're not mad?"

"I don't have the energy to be mad about anything right now."

"I wasn't meant to start for a bit because you have the police for now, but I just wanted to let you know."

"Yeah, I feel very safe." He said sarcastically, looking the other boy up and down.

"Oi! Have you forgotten what happened in training already?"

Tommy schooled his expression, making it perfectly blank. "Haven't a clue what you're talking about."

"Liar."

He opened the fridge, smiling innocently. "Juice?"

Ranboo gave up. "Yes please."

He grabbed a glass out of the cupboard, pouring him a cup and pushing it over the table. "You're taking all this pretty well."

“It hasn’t hit me yet.” Ranboo said quietly. “I wasn’t there like you were. I think that’s why everyone’s still holding out, because it’s Tsunami, if anyone could survive, it was her, and also we never thought it would happen.”

“Heroes die, not ours though. People go missing, not my friends though. Bodies get washed up in the river all the time, it was never going to be us.” Tommy poured himself a glass mechanically. “Until it was.” He couldn’t even conjure up any kind of tears at the news, all burned out.

“Want to watch something?” Tommy said finally. Ranboo leapt at the chance to change the subject.

“Sure. I know a show.” He seized the controller, switching channels until he found the one he wanted. “This one.”

“Don’t want to watch some kids cartoon,” Tommy muttered.

“It’s not a kids cartoon.” Ranboo protested. “You’ll like it, I promise. Just give it a chance.” He didn’t bother arguing, sitting back, staring blankly at the screen. It flew past his eyes, and he took some of it in, enough to follow the story, vaguely.

And then it was over. Tommy yawned, stretching. For all his complaints, he hadn’t minded it, Ranboo was right, it helped, not that he’d ever admit it. A news jingle started playing as it hit the hour, but he didn’t realise, heading into the kitchen to put his cup in the sink.

“...has been confirmed to be missing in action after what is believed to be a confrontation with the Syndicate. She had no family left, so she is remembered by her friends, her colleagues, and all those she saved.”

“Turn it off.”

Ranboo did so without question, looking slightly relieved. “Yeah no, I didn’t want to see that either.” He tried a hopeful smile. “I mean they didn’t say she was dead.”

“Heroes don’t die, they go missing in action,” Tommy said bitterly. “You know that. If they’re announcing it on TV, they know. They were talking like she’s gone; they just didn’t say it.”

“That was fast.” Ranboo sat back, taking in a deep, shaky breath. “I thought there would be more time.”

“They said they’d warn us.” He whispered. “They said they’d warn us if anything happened.”

“Maybe they gave up searching.”

Tommy shook his head. “The Captain would never give up. They must be sure.”

Quiet fell for a bit, both of them lost in thought, neither quite knowing what to say to that. Ranboo held up his phone finally. “Uh so there’s a vigil tonight, by the fountain in Founders Square. You know, to pray for her coming safely back, which, we kind of know is a bit late, but you know, I mean I’m not religious, I don’t know if you’re religious but it might be nice just to...”

“Just ask if I’m going for fucks sake.” Tommy said irritably. “You don’t have to draw it out into 20 sentences.”

“Are you going to go?”

“I might do. Are you?”

“Maybe. Just as me though not Void.”

Tommy nodded in agreement. “I don’t want to deal with any of that.”

“I was about to ask if you wanted to go.” Kristin came in the kitchen, giving the new boy a quick quizzical look. “I guess that solves that.”

Ranboo shifted his feet uncomfortably. “Alright if we’re doing that I’d better go home and get ready.”

“Tommy you haven’t introduced us,” Kristin told him pointedly.

“We’ve technically met,” Ranboo admitted. Her expression lit up with recognition, and she smiled slightly.

“I see. That makes sense. Do you need a lift to the vigil or anything, we can pick you up?”

“I’ll be alright, but thank you.” He swung his bag on his back. “I’ll see you later tonight?”

“Sounds good.”

“Bye Ms Walters!” He slipped out of the door, shutting it behind him quietly. Kristin watched him go, a little bemused.

“I’m assuming that was Void. He seems lovely.”

“He’s a prick,” Tommy muttered.

“Oh, so that’s Ranboo.” She hummed thoughtfully. “You’re right he is tall.”

“How did you pick that up from me insulting him?”

She ruffled his hair affectionately. “You’re nothing if not predictable sunflower.”

“Having second thoughts?” Kristin was waiting at the bottom of the stairs. Tommy pulled on a black hoodie, taking a deep breath.

“I don’t know if I can do this.”

“You haven’t left the house in three days,” Kristin said quietly. “We won’t stay for long unless you want to.”

He sniffled, shaking his head. "I don't want to."

"That's okay." She said gently. "I'll be with you the whole time, if you say you can't do it, we'll leave."

"It's admitting she's gone."

"It is whatever you need it to be. Whether you can accept things yet, that's up to you to do in your own time."

He wilted. "Do I have to?"

"You don't have to." She told him. "This was your idea. But I think you should, and I'll be going either way, so you can come with if you want to." He gave in, trudging down the stairs, hauling himself into the car. She handed him the aux cord, but he shook his head, not in the mood, staring out of the window in silence instead.

Founders Square stood at the far end of the City Hall plaza, a large fountain in the centre, three tiers tall. It held a few old government buildings, a bank, and a museum, mostly a tourist place, large and spacious.

The hall was visible in the distance, covered in tarpaulin and scaffolding so he couldn't even see the damage. It wasn't even a week old.

The fountain was surrounded by gifts and notes and tributes of all kinds, mostly bouquets. After Tsunami had let slip in an interview once how much she liked flowers two years people always bought her some whenever she was in public.

They hadn't forgotten. Someone was handing out candles, there were people gathered here and there, some just watching, some in tears.

"So many flowers already," Kristin said softly. "It's been here for two days but I didn't realise how many people had stopped by."

"They probably knew," Tommy said grimly. "The moment they said she was missing they knew. When a hero goes missing they don't come back. 's the way it is."

"You say that a lot," Kristin said, not unkindly. "There's no harm in letting yourself have a bit of hope."

"I was there." He said flatly. "It's kind of hard."

"She was my friend too."

Tommy sighed. "I know." The flowers were piled so high someone had to clear a path to the fountain so people could put candles in, with more coming in. A small crowd had gathered, though there were Enforcers stationed around the edge of the square slowing people going in, keeping it down. "They really loved her."

“I told you.” Kristin said softly. “You’re making a difference, with what you do. I’m so sorry you had to see it like this.” Her hand rested heavy on his shoulder, keeping him steady as they walked towards the memorial. A candle was placed into his hands, along with a whispered something he didn’t hear, some kind of prayer.

“I haven’t been to one of these since Archangel.” She said as they approached the fountain

“Not a single one? It’s been like ten years?”

“Couldn’t bring myself to.”

He struck a match, lighting a candle, gazing at it for a few moments before setting it on a tiny paper boat, letting it go, watching it sail across the surface, crowded in by so many others. It was a sea of stars, the light refracting off all the pennies at the bottom of the fountain, so many kinds of wishes.

He couldn’t help but think bitterly how futile it was to wish on coins and candles in the face of all this, but it was beautiful nonetheless.

A familiar fox hybrid stood by the water's edge, sniffing. “Hey Fundy.” He looked a mess, fur stuck up all over the place, the fur around his eyes gummed up with tears.

“Hey.” Fundy hesitated for a moment. “I was about to ask who you were but I think I can take a fair guess.” He said weakly. “I’m so sorry.”

“Don’t be.” Tommy stared at the fountain, watching the water spill over the edge as if watching the droplets would make it all easier, when all he could hear were the sounds of the waves she'd made when they were playing around by the river, moments before it all went so horribly wrong.

“She was a really good friend of mine. If I hadn’t swapped districts, she’d still be here.”

“She asked you to swap districts.” He cut in. “She asked you because that district was safer, there was no way you could have known.”

Fundy shook his head. “I don’t think...”

“The districts didn’t fucking matter.” He interrupted again. “So, stop that shit. They weren’t doing anything in District 8, they came there for her, we could have been in District 13, and too far away for me to get to safety. We never stood a chance.” If his voice broke, Fundy didn’t mention it, hanging his head.

“I guess you’re right.”

“Hi.” A familiar voice said from behind them. Ranboo appeared, clutching a bouquet of black and white roses in one hand.

“Oh hi Ranboo.”

“I think that’s the first time you’ve actually called me by my name.” He noted

“Don’t let it get to your head.” Tommy shot back, a little bit of his old self coming back

“All the shops on the way up are sold out of flowers, I can see why.” He studied the fountain, a small smile tugging at his mouth. “She would have loved this. But complained they weren’t being put in water and the ends hadn’t been trimmed properly.”

“Yeah.” Tommy managed a small huff of laughter. “Yeah, she would.”

“I bought the flowers from her house. They’re a little old, but I don’t know if Tubbo can make it in time.”

“Speak of the devil.” Tommy stared at the other side of the fountain, where a short figure in a familiar beanie was making his way around the fountain, straight for them. “What are the chances.”

“Not that low.” Tubbo joined them, pointing at Ranboo. “He told me you’d be here and I didn’t want to come on my own so yeah. Here I am.”

“Since when were you two best friends?” He asked, baffled.

“I wouldn’t really say we’re best friends.” Tubbo tilted his head. “Actually, to be fair you two are kind of my best friends as I don’t have any others. But actually, he just made bad conversation when I went past Niki’s one time and had terrible taste in shows so I had to correct him.”

Tommy winced. “Ouch? That was somehow a self-burn and managed to make fun of him.”

Tubbo put on a cheery smile. “That’s me.”

“You snuck out?” Tubbo nodded. Ranboo took the lilies out of his bag, now even more battered, holding them out to him. “Do you want to put these down?”

“I have fresh ones.” The goat hybrid pulled them out carefully, gathering them into a bunch with the old ones, a fond smile on his face. “I left the roots on and all.”

Tommy managed a choked laugh as he brandished a handful of beautiful lilies proudly. “So, you did.”

“Do you think I cursed her?”

Tommy jumped. “What kind of question is that.”

Tubbo watched the candles, oddly quiet. “White lilies. They’re really pretty. Get used in funerals a lot, they’re kind of known for it actually.”

“Yes, your flower made the Syndicate decide to kill Niki, that makes sense,” Tommy said sarcastically. “Look man, I say stupid shit but that’s real stupid.”

That got a faint smile out of the other boy. “Fair enough.” A few tears sparkled in his eyes, but he blinked them away. “I’m not staying, or I’ll just cry. I’ll see you around?”

“I guess. See you around.”

“Can you get back safely?” Kristin asked, worried. “It’s a long way back in the dark.”

“I talked one of the security guards into taking me.” Tubbo said politely, “But thank you.” He turned to go, walking away quickly, keeping his head down.

“See you soon,” Tommy called out, and Ranboo echoed him, waving. If he heard them, the other boy didn’t react.

“He’s an odd one,” Ranboo remarked, watching him go. “I don’t think I’ve ever talked to him for longer than five minutes at a time.”

“You’re an odd one.” Tommy retorted. The older boy didn’t disagree, picking up his bag, looking around the square one final time.

“I. I’ll see you tomorrow?” He asked

“You know what? Sure.” Tommy said after a moment. Kristin put her arm around his shoulders, leading him back to the car, and he leaned into her, a rock in the ever-turning world.

Chapter End Notes

Fun fact, as Tubbo said, white lilies are frequently used at funerals. I knew what I was doing when he gave them to her.

Grief arc wooo. I’m so excited to keep writing, but I don’t want to rush this, I want to do it justice, the struggle is real. Also I was trying to write angst and then got hit right in the middle of writing this chapter with Ranboo being back in the UK, (I called it) which made me really happy, so that made it much harder to write lmao, so sorry if it’s not quite tragic enough, I got distracted

Chapter 15

Chapter Summary

Tommy kept on switching through channels, reached for a plate of half-eaten food. A piece of paper fell out of his pocket, the corner of some very expensive writing pad, flowers crawling up the sides. A phone number was scrawled across it, with a little note

Ranboo has this, so seems fair. You seem like you have bad movie taste too
- Tubbo

Chapter Notes

Teeny tiny chapter to tide you over while I catch up, updating every day or twice a day for the last two weeks has worked through most of my partially prewritten section so I'm racing to keep up

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Eret accepted his application for sick leave without question, encouraging him to take as long off as he needed, assuring him that Foolish could help him run the shop for now, which settled that worry.

Ranboo would drop by most days, sometimes just for a few minutes, sometimes he would stay all afternoon, the both of them sat on the couch, watching another old TV show.

They didn't always talk much, and though at first Tommy had complained loudly, he still complained, each time it had less and less, it was much easier when he didn't have to sit in silence all day. Time seemed to spin together but he was a constant.

Both of them had now been shifted off rotation while the agency worked out what to do with them, which wasn't saying much when neither quite knew what to do with themselves.

Ranboo hadn't come over today. Tommy set up a kind of camp on the living room couch, blankets and snacks, a cold mug of coffee sitting on the table, he'd never admit he was waiting for the doorbell to go. The TV was always on now, even though it was the same old repeats he'd seen a hundred times, even if it was morbid, it was better than silence, flashes of newsreels half flying over his head.

“Early annual reviews reveal one of the best years for commerce that Manberg has ever seen,”

“The president’s approval ratings have skyrocketed once again, in part due to a surge of support for the recent military crackdown on illegal meta hideouts.”

“The son of President Schlatt made a rare appearance at the memorial to Tsunami, the recently deceased member of the Hero Agency. An unusual appearance, to be sure, Schlatt’s made his opinions

on metas more than clear. He gave a short address this morning in response to paparazzi images showing him at the scene.” A blurred photo of Tubbo popped up, setting down the lilies.

He appeared stood in the press room, looked exhausted, barely held together with a suit, beanie pulled down as far as possible, nearly covering his eyes. “She saved my life a week ago.” He told a reporter. “I was there at City Hall, I spoke to Theseus, Void was the one to teleport me to safety, I watched Tsunami put the flames out, they all seemed so kind. I just wanted to pay my respects; I might not be here today without them. I don’t want this to become some kind of narrative about my father or myself, as you know I prefer to keep my life private, and the fact that images were taken of me at a memorial is incredibly intrusive and very stressful for me at an already difficult time, so I would appreciate it if these photos stopped circulating.”

Tommy kept on switching through channels, reached for a plate of half-eaten food. A piece of paper fell out of his pocket, the corner of some very expensive writing pad, flowers crawling up the sides. A phone number was scrawled across it, with a little note

Ranboo has this, so seems fair. You seem like you have bad movie taste too

- Tubbo

Tommy turned it over curiously, but there was nothing on the other side. It must have been slipped into his pocket and he hadn’t noticed. He reached for his plate, setting it aside for now, picking at his food slowly.

He looked up hearing a familiar voice all of a sudden. The Warden was on the screen, talking to a news host across a video link from his office. “And you’ve made no advances on finding her body?”

“Not any more than we’ve already reported.” He replied patiently. “The issue is, knowing what we do about who her killers are likely to have been, we’re unlikely to find anything at all.”

“You said her apprentice came back with blood on his hands, is there any chance that...”

“None.” The Warden cut in. “Absolutely not.”

“Can you be sure?”

“Yes. Not only was Theseus displaying all the signs of Orpheus’s powers, but he also had wounds consistent with being held at knifepoint, as well as eyewitness testimony placing Achilles nearby. Bullet casing was found nearby, none of the apprentices, or in fact active heroes have any form of access to that kind of weaponry, nor is Theseus...” Tommy switched the TV off, feeling numb. He stared at the number in his hands for a bit.

Hi Tubbo it’s Tommy

The reply came almost instantly

funny story. i forgot to ask your name. you were just theseus, so i really hope you’re the same guy

Tommy blinked, taken off guard. **Right**

want to call? i can show you the bees

Uh sure

His phone began to ring, and he accepted the call. Tubbo's face flickered up on the screen, framed in the leaves of his greenhouse. "Hi."

"Hey." Tommy managed a faint smile. "This is kinda weird."

"Yeah, cos like, we've spoken what, three times?" He looked up in the air as if it held some kind of answer, and then shrugged. "Something like that, anyway, it's four now, come look at my bees."

He wandered over to the side of the greenhouse, kneeling down next to a row of wooden boxes. "Look." He pulled the lid of a hive off carefully, no beekeeping equipment of any kind, not even gloves.

"Won't you get stung?"

He shook his head. "They know me. I've never been stung by them. Look." He tapped the side of the hive. "See this, it's called a super. The honeycomb is on these frames in here, I think there's a couple that are nearly ready. You can tell if they're ready if they're capped." He pulled it out very gently, tapping it. "See, it's got these little covers over the top? Capped."

"What happens if it's not ready?" Tommy asked curiously. "Honey is just honey, isn't it?"

"Well, then it gets too moist and ferments. Which, I mean if you want alcohol that's fine, but I don't." Tubbo placed the frame back gently.

"What are you going to do with it?"

He hummed. "Give some to the kitchens, save some for me, it's really nice with toast, if you melt the butter just right and swirl the honey in it's really good. Maybe I'll make some candles with the wax, I like having candles in the greenhouse, I can't have them anywhere else because of the 'fire risk' but no one minds if I have it here."

"How do you make candles?" Tommy asked curiously. The other boy glanced up.

"You really want to know?"

"Well, yeah

"I don't know, people normally don't want to hear about it."

"You called to talk about bees, I wanna talk about bees."

His words dawned on Tubbo's face slowly, and the other boy gave him a small, shy smile. "Oh. Well. You have to purify the wax, because when it comes out of the hive it has tons of icky stuff on it so you have to cook it." He dragged out a large cooking pot, the inside blackened. "I have a gas stove, I managed to buy it one time I snuck out, and I borrow, well, steal gas from the kitchen when no one's looking. You break the honey comb up, put it in a pot, fill it up with water and heat it up until it's a mess, strain away the icky bits, and then keep melting it and straining it until it's clean, then you let it cool, and when it finishes cooling you pour the water away and boom, you get this circle of hardened beeswax that floats on top."

Tommy leaned on his hand, content to let the other boy ramble, not quite taking it all in, but it was interesting enough. “And then candles?”

“Well, kind of. I tend to make one kind of candle because they’re fast, I just get a cup and put a wick in, and then pour wax around it, you have to get the right cup though, or it’ll shatter with the heat. Or you can get a wick and dip it into wax over and over again until it starts to build up, but that takes ages, and I always get it everywhere, so cup candles.” He reached up, pulling down a pint glass, half-filled with a used candle. “This was last year’s.”

“That’s cool,” Tommy said, genuinely intrigued. There was a lull as he began tidying things into the shed. “You didn’t get in trouble, for the stuff at the vigil?”

“No.” Tubbo’s expression dropped at the mention of it. “Although I wish I had. He just saw it as a great publicity stunt. Playing to the public interest, you know how he is.”

“I don’t, actually, but I can imagine.” He paused. “I can’t, actually, but I can try.”

Tubbo hummed in agreement, hauling the blackened pot back inside. “Cos you know, I lose the woman who basically raised me, sounds like a PR moment.”

He leaned against his pillow, rubbing his eyes.

“Want me to leave you alone?” Tubbo sat back on his heels, glancing up at the camera. “You sound tired.”

Tommy thought it over for a moment. “Yeah. Thank you for calling, I needed to talk to someone but. I think I need a bit.”

“No problem bossman. Take care.” The call ended, and he reached for his charger, plugging his phone in and slumping back on his bed, staring at the ceiling.

“Tommy? You done?” Ranboo’s voice echoed in, making him jump.

“Yeah. You can come in.” The other meta slipped in, shutting the door behind him.

“Sorry, I knocked but you didn’t answer so I let myself in.” He explained. “I won’t be here for long, you sound tired.” He looked up at the muted TV and sighed. “Are you still watching that? It makes it worse, I’ve had to unplug the TV.”

“What is it?” Tommy avoided the question, which the other boy noted, but chose not to comment on.

“I just came to give you something. They went through Niki’s belongings today.”

“Already?”

“There was something for you.” He looked up to see an outstretched hand, holding a small blue and black octopus toy.

Tommy’s world tilted, and he just stared at it. “She must have got it when we were turned the other way.” Ranboo said. Tommy opened his mouth, and then shut it again. “She got me one too, they were

just sat in her locker.” He managed a weak smile. “I guess she wanted to make sure we didn’t steal them after all.”

“May I?” The older boy nodded, and Tommy picked it up ever so gently, cradling it in his hands, gazing at it.

“Are you alright?”

“I want to be left alone. Please.”

He nodded quietly, understanding, and disappeared. The door barely closed before Tommy doubled over, hugging Shroud to his chest, sobbing like a child.

Chapter End Notes

How can I turn a plushie into angst you say? Well look no further.

I love that octopus duo is Tommy and Niki's duo name. Did you know sunrise duo is Niki and Techno's duo name? Too soon?

There's so many people here all of a sudden, where did you all come from? I post this fic pretty much exclusively at 2am, with no editing and minimal planning I didn't expect so many of you to be here

Candyfloss and Kristin

Chapter Summary

“Hi.”

“You weren’t at the shop. It was so quiet.” Techno said awkwardly. “I was wondering what happened to you.”

“Just had a lot going on in my life.” Tommy said heavily, “I’ll be back soon.”

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

“Morning. How are you?” Kristin came in, sitting by his bed with a cup of tea in hand.

He shrugged. “I am.”

“No need to get existential on me.” She teased him softly, but there was no reaction. “You know, I was thinking, you’ll be back on duty soon.”

“Already?”

She nodded sadly, brushing his hair out of his face gently. “Time flies, sunflower. They need everyone they can get. But that’s not why I’m here.” He turned over to look at her, leaning against the wall. “I was thinking, I don’t get you to myself like this often, we’re always working. We haven’t done anything proper together for a while,”

“I don’t really feel like going anywhere.”

“It’s not much. We could go to the arcade in the mall.” She offered. “Just mess around for the afternoon, like we used to. Being cooped up in your room won’t do you any good.”

He thought it over for a few minutes. Kristin waited, a hopeful look on her face, before he finally caved. “I’d like that.” He admitted.

“Get up then.” She tugged his arm, “And get dressed. And bring the plates down before they rot, as much as compost is good for the environment I don’t want it in your room.”

“But it’s good for the atmosphere.” He whined.

“Not for the smell, bring them down.” She repeated, leaving no room for argument, taking a couple of mugs down for him from the small pile of things on his desk he couldn’t be bothered to move. He groaned, dragging himself up, resigning himself to missing out on the day of cartoons he had planned.

The mall was filled with people, everyone out for the weekend. It was near bursting at the seams, the tables outside the fast food places were heaving with couples and families, voices rising to the curved glass roof, echoing past each floor, reverberating among the arches. It held every kind of shop

possible, practically the heart of the city, from small supermarkets to clothing to phone repairs to jewellery, small cafes dotted around.

Plants lined the centre in large concrete planters, bushes, palm trees, surprisingly well cared for, leaves stirred by a pleasant breeze flowing through the building. One palm tree noticeably was held up with supports, a leftover from the Syndicate attack two months ago. The mall owners refused to take it down, coaxing it back to health in some kind of defiance against what had happened.

Although Tommy wasn't quite sure how a palm tree could be a symbol of defiance against a terrorist, it worked. The numbers of shoppers were slowly rising again, the district bouncing back as if nothing had happened, every other trace of the attack wiped from the earth.

All that remained was the lopsided tree, and now and then, an Enforcer patrolling past. The crowd parting around them, one or two eyeing the heavy weaponry they wore, but for most people it was just part of life, they kept on walking. The owners had held out a long time against having Enforcers inside, saying it was bad for business, but one terrorist attack later, and their complaints had stopped very quickly.

"Hmm? You look serious," Kristin glanced down, but he shook his head.

"Just thinking." He trotted after her as they headed up to the second floor, over to the far corner. The arcade they were heading to was tucked a little away, two tinted glass doors leading in, lined with flashing lights.

It was packed as well, a blur of faces in front of rows of machines and bright screens with all assortments of joysticks and toggles and controllers, the room forming a cacophony of beeping and cheerful jingles and revving engines, with the whirr of ticket machines and canned laughter. "Where do we start?"

"Over here." Kristin made her way over to one of those coin slider machines, the ones you put a coin in and try and push the others off the shelf with it. The shelves were nearly full, very close to tipping a large stack of money into the drawer, but just not close enough. She looked left and right. "Tommy?"

"Yeah?"

"Are you thinking what I'm thinking?" She eyed the precarious pile of coins. Tommy's eyes widened.

"You serious?"

"These places are made to scam people." She said quietly. "It won't hurt." He grinned, and the tiniest flicker of red light curled around the coin, inching it forward the tiny bit that it needed to topple over the edge. A cascade of coins spilled into the drawer, and Kristin cheered. She winked at him. "Don't tell my work about that one." He let himself laugh a little, a genuine smile spreading across his face. She shovelled it out of the drawer into his hands. "There, all yours. Now we have coins for the machines."

"Wait you need some." He split it, handing some over. "What now?"

"Where do you want to go first?" He pointed at a racing game over in the corner, already sucked in, the atmosphere infectious. It was a welcome distraction, easy to get lost in the neon lights and cheap plastic, doing stupid things for the hell of it.

They went from game to game, winning some, losing some. Tommy was pretty good, a leftover from many afternoons spent in the arcade in the summer or when school was over, back before Kristin was promoted and she couldn't take him places as often anymore. They came out of a game of mini basketball a little while later, triumphant again, yellow tickets trailing out of Tommy's pockets, a wide grin on his face.

"Can't believe you took me gambling to get me out of my room."

She rolled her eyes. "Stop that. You used to love coming here."

"Yeah, and then I lost one time, and I never wanted to come again," Tommy said smugly. "But now I like it again." He held up the long trail of tickets bundled up in his hand, aiming for the ticket booth. It was stacked high with erasers and pencils, tubs of candy floss and cheap dart guns. He looked hopefully at a large stuffed polar bear, but Kristin was already shaking her head. "I'm not carrying that around all day."

"I'll carry it." He promised. "I swear."

She gave him a disbelieving look. "You can have the candyfloss instead." His attitude immediately switched.

"Yes okay, fine, sounds good." She pointed out a large tub to the attendant, who handed it over. Tommy almost snatched it out of Kristin's hands, a gleeful look on his face.

"I'm going to regret this." Tommy nodded eagerly.

"You absolutely will."

"Don't make yourself sick." He looked up, already shovelling sugar into his mouth.

"Don't know what you're talking about." There was a sudden gunshot from a booth next to him, a shooting game of some kind, zombies and aliens, something he would have loved as a kid. He stopped dead, searching around for it blindly.

"Are you alright?" Kristin was next to him without a moment's hesitation, looking around protectively. "What happened?"

"Uh. It's kinda stuffy in here, I'm going to go get some air." He said, a little too quickly. She clearly didn't believe him.

"Do you want me to come with you?"

"I'm fine. I'm a big man, don't need my mum to follow me around everywhere." He yanked the door open before she could say anything else, stumbling out, the cold air washing over his skin, bumping into a woman in a red coat as he went past. She gave him a strange look but he barely stopped to say sorry, finding his way to a bench that looked down on the ground floor, sitting down. Kristin didn't follow, knowing when he needed space.

He leaned his head against the railings, watching people stream past, annoyed at himself. It had been a gunshot, in a game, why had it startled him so badly. He ground his knuckles against his head, one fist closed around the candyfloss bucket, now half forgotten.

"Tommy!"

Tommy nearly jumped out of his skin. The call came again, echoing up from somewhere downstairs. He didn't have to look far, two familiar and very recognisable faces were heading up the escalator, Techno leaning his head in one hand, looking disappointed, Chayanne next to him buried in a yellow hoodie a bit too big for him. He sat up quickly, wiping his eyes off, ducking a bit more behind the plant next to him, but it was too late. Techno strolled over, hands in his pockets.

"Hey."

"Hi." Tommy stared back at him.

"You weren't at the shop. It was so quiet." Techno said awkwardly. "I was wondering what happened to you."

"Just had a lot going on in my life." Tommy said heavily, "I'll be back soon." Before Techno could note the sudden mood swing Chayanne appeared behind him, eyes lighting up.

"He says hi," Techno said, the very edge of a fond smile tugging at his mouth. "Not that you can tell because he's hiding in his hoodie."

"Our old man is here too." Chayanne volunteered, pushing his hands out of his sleeves to make his signs more visible. He looked around as if he'd appear out of one of the fake plants or something.

"Old man?"

"Old old man." Techno agreed. "Ancient. Chayanne likes to say he's on death's doorstep really, hasn't got long left."

"Oh." Tommy began to grin. "Old man. I understand."

"Just you here?"

"Nah, Kristin's here too. Speaking of which." He got to his feet, making a quick escape back into the arcade.

He found her in the corner at a booth absolutely destroying some child at some game, the little boy laughing along with her, intent, tiny fingers gripping the controller with everything he had. Tommy watched with a slight smile on his face. She had a way of putting people at ease, she'd done it to him enough times, despite how hard he'd tried to brush her off. For a few moments, he saw a small blonde curly-haired boy in the other's place, wearing a jumper that was far too big for him, stumbling after her.

She passed the kid the tickets when she won, making some kind of joke to make him laugh, before picking up her things, nearly bumping into Tommy on the way out. "There you are! Feeling better?"

"Techno and Chayanne are here." He said glumly. "They said the old man is here too."

"Old man?"

"An old man." He agreed solemnly. "Chayanne says he hasn't got long left."

Kristin looked very confused. "Oh. Okay. Where are they?"

"Outside, I'm avoiding them." She frowned.

"Did you run off?"

"Maybe." He mumbled through a mouthful of candyfloss. "Does it matter?"

"That's not very polite." She said, resigned, knowing full well that wasn't going to stop him. "Where are they now?"

He waved in the vague direction of the door, and she swung her bag over her shoulder. "Well, I'm getting hungry any way, we should get some food."

"Can we wait until they've left?"

"Don't be dramatic. Here, give me the rest of that and I'll keep it safe, or you won't want lunch." Tommy wrapped his arms around the tub of sugar protectively, but she shook her head, easing it out of his grip. "You know I won't eat it, and you can have it back whenever you want."

"Don't use the child voice on me."

"Then don't act like one." She teased him gently. He let go of the tub, letting her tuck it away in her bag. "Come on then." He hovered behind her as they headed towards the door, trying to stay out of sight, which wasn't much use when his recent growth spurt had left him standing over her head.

Phil had evidently caught up with them, Chayanne explaining something with dramatic hand gestures. He spotted them coming out of the arcade, pointing them out. Phil raised a hand in greeting,

"Oh Phil," Kristin said, one eyebrow raised. "Tommy you talk a lot of rubbish."

Phil looked between them, baffled. "He tried to have me think you were ancient." She told him. "Going on about how old you were and how you didn't have long left, I thought you were someone completely different."

There was a burst of laughter, Chayanne's head thrown back, shoulders shaking with mirth. Phil sighed heavily.

"Don't encourage him!"

"I can't believe the both of you." Phil shook his head. "Kristin I'm so sorry."

"I don't mind, they're having fun. It's nice to see you again."

"We can take care of Tommy if you're going to go chat." Techno offered immediately, leaning against the wall with a smug grin on his face, watching his little brother.

"Bitch." Tommy shot back

"Tommy!" Kristin cut in, "Be polite."

"You have to talk to him like that," Tommy said seriously. "He doesn't understand anything else."

"He's right." Techno agreed, not bothered in the slightest. "I don't."

"Should we go somewhere a little quieter?" Phil offered, glancing at the crowds rushing past them. "I know a place."

“That sounds like a great idea.” She agreed before Tommy could get a word in. He scowled at her instead, but she didn’t seem to notice, following Phil. The two of them had their heads together, chatting intently, their children trailing behind mostly forgotten.

Luckily Chayanne’s attention was mostly taken up by ribbing Techno, who was patiently ignoring him, even as the verbal jabs turned more into pointed elbows and playful shoves, dodging around to the other side of a large planter to avoid him.

Phil showed them to a little cafe just outside, up against the river bank, all pretty white tables and flowers, finding them a seat in the far corner.

“Aw look. It has a sand pit. Just for you.” Techno pointed out a small play area to Tommy. Tommy scowled at him.

“Shut the fuck up.”

“Be nice sunflower.” Kristin laid her hand on Tommy’s shoulder. “He’s only messing around.”

“Awww. Sunflower.” Techno chimed in right away, an odd look on his face that seemed at odds with the teasing voice

“Oh fuck off. You can’t call me that. Only Kristin can call me that.”

“You can't stop me," Techno said lazily

“I’ll fucking fight you bitch.” The elder grinned at the challenge.

“Techno come with me and get yourself a drink.” Phil cut in, giving Tommy an apologetic look. “You’re getting carried away.”

Tommy wandered over to the river, staring down into it. It was murky, and polluted, and if he looked hard enough, he could see the outlines of a shopping cart, caught on a branch. There it was again, being back by the river bought it all back, and he could hear them walking, and laughing, and messing around, just as they’d done so many times. It had been fine so many times until it wasn’t.

He looked away sharply, suddenly irrationally afraid of seeing something he didn’t want to in it’s depths

“Are you alright?” Tommy’s head dropped, the smile he’d been holding so bravely slipping through his fingers. Techno had reappeared, patting his shoulder awkwardly. “Whatever's bothering you, I’m sure it’ll be fine.”

“I mean, it won’t be.” He said wryly.

“Can I...do anything to help?” He asked, surprisingly kind all of a sudden.

“Can you bring people back from the dead?” Tommy replied bluntly. Techno, to his credit, barely stuttered.

“Well. Not in my skillset personally, I’m afraid.”

“Well, that sucks.” He turned back, looking down at the shopping cart.

“Death is death. You lose people, over time, you never know when it’s coming, it’s sucks, but it is what it is, you know.”

“Your speeches suck.” Tommy stuffed his hands in his pockets, shivering a little.

“I know,” Techno replied, not bothered in the slightest. “Tommy, you know what, they’d want you to be miserable.” His head spun around.

“What?”

“They’d want you to feel awful about it, and guilty, and blame yourself and put your whole life on hold forever thinkin’ about what happened to them.” He said, sounding bored. Tommy squinted at him suspiciously

“Is this that reverse psychopathy shit?”

“Psychology.” He corrected. “And sort of.” Tommy rolled his eyes, turning away again.

“It sounds stupid. And it was my fault, if I’d just been a little more aware nothing would have happened.”

“It’s supposed to sound stupid. Can you hear how stupid you sound when you say it’s your fault?”

“But it was my fault.” He pressed. “You don’t know what happened, you weren’t there.”

“Do you have a habit of walking around murdering people?”

“No?” He replied, confused. A slight smile flickered over Techno’s face.

“Really? It’s one of my favourite hobbies.” Tommy stared at him.

“Really?”

“You’re so gullible.” Techno almost sounded disappointed

“Fuck you.”

“Anyway, as long as you’re not a serial killer of some sort there’s no need to worry about murdering people, is there.” He continued, completely ignoring whatever expletive laden outburst the younger came up with.

“Your speeches really suck,” He shrugged, indifferent.

“I never said they were good.” Tommy opened his mouth to reply, and shut it again, unable to come up with a reply to that. He was saved from that embarrassment a few moments later.

“Kristin and Phil seem to be getting along well.” Chayanne signed, a takeaway cup of coffee clamped in his teeth. Techno held his hand out, taking it from his little brother and holding it so he was free to sign.

“Probably bonding over how annoying we are.” Tommy agreed. “I imagine that’s what adults do.”

"Speak for yourself. I was a perfect child." Techno said innocently. "I would never be annoying."

"You're a grown adult. You're the oldest here," Techno turned away from the water, narrowing his eyes at Chayanne.

"Well I'm still the favourite child."

"Oh fuck o..." His little brother began. Techno tilted his head in a warning, and Chayanne's hands fell still, burying them in his sleeves, though he was still smiling.

"None of that language, child here."

"Fucking bitch piece of shit. He's younger than me." Tommy piped up immediately. "You can't ask me to watch my fucking language." A brilliant smile slowly broke over Chayanne's face.

"We should keep him." He declared happily. "I like him."

"You would," Techno watched the river flow past, thoughtful. He turned, placing a hand on the younger boy's head serenely. "Annoying, loud." He placed a hand on top of Chayanne's. "A gremlin. You'll get along great."

"I will bite your hand off if you don't remove it." Tommy hissed.

"Agreed," Chayanne signed, suddenly deadpan, before taking a long draft of coffee out of Techno's cup when he wasn't looking. Techno ruffled Chayanne's hair in response, earning an enraged shriek.

"Haha, loser," Tommy said absentmindedly. Chayanne's head turned to him, before setting in a determined expression. Tommy backed away warily

"What are you doing?" The younger boy suddenly lunged for him, and Tommy staggered back with a shriek, saved from the river by Techno grabbing his collar, dragging him back and shoving him towards the children's play area. He took off at a run, Chayanne in hot pursuit, cup brandished in one hand.

Kristin wandered over after a while, Phil in tow, not looking overly concerned.

"Is everything alright?"

Techno studied the scene in front of him, Tommy shrieking, shaking icecubes out of his shirt, Chayanne with a fistful more clenched ready, waving it at him threateningly, dancing back and forward, taunting him.

"I'm about to witness a murder. I can't tell you who's just yet."

"Boys will be boys." She said, watching fondly.

"That they will." Phil agreed.

Shameless self promo time, I'm @soulfirephoen1x on twitter, please follow, I post funny stuff, honest

Also thank you so much to everyone who's been commenting, theorising everything in the comments, I love seeing all of that, it makes me so happy to see people examining my writing, finding the clues I've left, because there are definitely many clues, and while I can't confirm or deny anything it's so much fun to read. Nothing has made me more hyped to keep writing than seeing people get invested in the story and where it's going so please keep it up, it means the world

Chapter 17

Chapter Summary

“I’m with Theseus,” Ranboo said, surprisingly boldly. “We’re sticking together.” Tommy sent a surprised look at the other boy, but it went unnoticed

“I understand your mentor probably got you used to disobeying orders, but she was a hero with far experience and far more years in the Agency under her belt. You can’t expect the same privileges.”

“And she died.” Tommy’s voice was flat. “Why are you sending us out as if we’ll be any use.”

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Tommy's hero bag lay at the back of his closet, barely having moved over the last two weeks. He eyed it with suspicion, and then kicked the door back shut, deciding to deal with that later, grabbing himself breakfast, gulping down cereal like his life depended on it.

“Don’t rush, I woke you up a bit early so you’d have time to get ready.” Kristin walked in, a smoothie in her hand, though she hadn’t touched it yet, looking a little uneasy. “How are you feeling?”

“Like shit.” He said honestly, around a mouthful of food. “You have your thinking face on.” He noted. She leaned her head on her hand, an unreadable expression on her face.

“Please be careful out there.”

“I’m always careful,” he replied automatically.

“I mean it.” She insisted. He set his spoon down, glaring at her.

“Don’t get all serious on me. I’m fine.”

“Tommy, please. I can’t lose you too.”

“I can’t die.” His voice broke a bit but he kept up the face. “No need to worry.”

“Isn’t there?” She was more blunt this time. “All the first-generation heroes are gone, except the Warden, Supreme and the Captain. Archangel, Iskall, Impulse, Gemini and now Niki, you can’t lie to yourself about this, it’s dangerous.”

“You weren’t worried about me before.”

“I was, and I am.” She sat down next to him, putting her arm around his shoulders, pulling him over.

“I worry every day. Every single day.”

He leaned against her, resting his head on her shoulder. “How do you handle that?”

“Some days I don’t, when I got the call about Niki I thought I’d lost you.” She admitted.

“And you’re fine? With sending me out to that job every day?”

“We’ve talked about this. What can we do?” She said softly. “What other choice do we have? Unless you can get a citizen’s license, either by proving you’re not a threat by government standards, which failed, or by retiring from the hero program, you won’t have a normal life. I’ve done everything I can to try and give you as normal a childhood as I could, I can’t do anything else.”

He stared at the ceiling. “Almost certain death or a containment facility, what great choices.” He joked, but it felt weak even before he said it

“What kind of mother am I?” She said sadly. “When the only things I can do for my child is send him out onto the front lines or send him away to a prison.”

“I mean, if you hadn’t adopted me, I’d probably already be in one.” He pointed out. “So I got lucky really.”

She pushed his hair out of his face. “I don’t think the worst case scenario is the one we should be comparing ourselves to, sunflower.”

“Yeah well, you’re a great mum. Best one I’ve ever had.” He said, completely straight-faced.

“Oh, you.” She pushed him playfully. “By that standard, it makes me the worst you’ve ever had as well.”

“Exactly!” He sobered a little. “We’re making it better. That’s the Warden’s plans, that’s the point of all this, we’re proving we can help. You said it yourself. It won’t be like this forever.”

“I know, but I don’t want a hero.” She said quietly. “I want my son. At the end of the day, when this is all over, that’s all I want.”

He glared at her. “I’m trying not to cry already.”

“Please be careful.” She repeated. “Promise me you’ll be careful. If I lose you too I don’t know what I’ll do.”

“I’ll be fine.” He said dismissively, standing up to put his bowl away. She stopped him with a hand on his wrist.

“Promise me, Tommy. Promise me you won’t get overconfident, or reckless, or run your mouth or any of the Tommy things you do that could get you in danger.”

“I promise.” He said finally. “Happy?”

Kristin nodded, letting him go. He put his bowl in the dishwasher, pushing it shut. The doorbell went, and she sighed, standing up. “That’ll be Ranboo. You should grab your things.”

He went to get his bag, digging through his closet to drag it out, swinging it over his shoulder. He was dragging his feet, trying to waste as much time as possible, putting off going back for as long as he could. Ranboo and Kristin were deep in conversation when he came back, the older boy chatting animatedly, running a hand through his hair, a little nervous.

“Morning,” Tommy said, yawning.

“Afternoon.” Ranboo leaned back against the counter. “You alright?”

“I’m shit. Let’s go.” He shrugged his bag onto his shoulder.

“Lunch.” Kristin cut in. “It’s in the fridge.” He opened it, taking out a box, tucking it into his bag. “Ranboo sweetie, do you have lunch to take with you?” She asked.

“Uh.” He shuffled his feet awkwardly. “I was going to get it there?”

“That’s alright. I made spare.” She slipped a foil wrapped package over. “You need to eat more.”

Tommy groaned, grabbing the other boy's wrist. “Quick, she’s adopting you, run.”

“But I want parents.” He joked. Tommy stopped dead, staring, and then tugged him towards the door again.

“Don’t care, I’ll get that origin story later. Bye mum!” He yanked him out.

“Bye Ms Walters!” Ranboo called over his shoulder

“You can call me Kristin you know!” She called.

“Bye Kristin!”

They found themselves outside the Warden’s office a little later, back in uniform. Tommy was pacing back and forth impatiently, adjusting and readjusting his cape

“Please can you stop?” Void asked. “It’s making me really nervous.”

“You look weird again,” Tommy noted, but he stopped pacing. “But the other way around.”

Void adjusted his mask, flashing him a smile. “Probably because you’ve seen my real face more often now.”

Tommy hummed in agreement, only half paying attention, shifting from foot to foot. “What if he tries to make me go back on patrol?”

“He won’t.” Void reached over, squeezing his shoulder. “I’ve got you. Don’t worry, if he tries to push you I’ve got your back.”

Tommy gave him a genuine smile. “Thank you. I appreciate that.”

Void shuddered dramatically. “Who are you and what have you done with the real Theseus.”

“Oh shut the fuck up bitch.”

That got a snigger. “There he is.”

“Come on in!” Tommy shot the other boy a panicked look, and just got a blank one in return.

“I guess we’re doing this.” He pushed the door open, stepping inside, his hands clammy.

The Warden sat at his desk, helmet removed for once to reveal short dark hair, a cloth mask covering his nose and mouth, less constrictive than the armour. His trident lay discarded behind him, leaning against the wall. "Theseus, Void, it's good to have you back."

"Hi."

He sat forward. "I'll imagine you're all up to date with news, so I won't bore you with the details. I suggested putting you with new mentors but..."

"Absolutely not."

The Warden held up a hand warningly. "Let me finish. But it was rebuked by the Captain, she informed me you might feel very strongly about that, as we can see. We also don't have enough free mentors right now to make that viable. Therefore, I penciled you in as taking your old patrol route."

"Out of the question," Tommy said immediately

"I'm sorry?"

"We're not going back on patrol yet." He continued. "I'm happy to help out, but I won't be any use on patrol, I will just break down if we even go in the area, I can't do that again. I don't trust myself not to let my patrol partner down."

"Theseus we gave you two weeks, and it's more than safe now."

"It's not whether or not it's safe, it's about me." He said flatly. "You've already forced me back into work earlier than I wanted to, I want to help, but I can't go back on patrol yet."

"Void I hope...."

"I'm with Theseus," Ranboo said, surprisingly boldly. "We're sticking together." Tommy sent a surprised look at the other boy, but it went unnoticed

"I understand your mentor probably got you used to disobeying orders, but she was a hero with far experience and far more years in the Agency under her belt. You can't expect the same privileges."

"And she died." Tommy's voice was flat. "Why are you sending us out as if we'll be any use."

He sat back, folding his arms. "What do you want me to do here, exactly. I can't keep making allowances for you."

"You always have jobs around the Tower." Ranboo suggested. "Android is always asking for people to help." The Warden sat back, looking a little annoyed, mulling it over.

"There is one other option." He said finally. "But it's not active duty."

Void looked up quickly. "Sure. We'll do it."

"Fine." He said, a little irritated he didn't even get to explain it first. "You'll work with the Captain. Whatever she wants you to do, you do, for as long as she needs you to do it, that is your only other option. And keep in mind, it will be paperwork and a lot of it."

Tommy wilted inside, but also it was a way out, and he'd take anything he could get. "Alright."

“Sounds good.” Void echoed his agreement. The Warden’s jaw tightened for a moment, but he said nothing, leaning forward and pressing a button on his desk.

“I got you the help you wanted, come up to my office.”

He sat back again, looking annoyed. “This is a one-time thing, because of special circumstances, try this again and you’ll be in trouble for wasting my time.”

“We understand,” Void interjected, before Tommy could speak. “Thank you.”

“Any other questions?”

Tommy shrugged. “Don’t think so.”

“I do have one question, if I may.” Void said hesitantly. The Warden waved for him to carry on. “I’m just curious. Before this all happened, when you wanted us to transfer from Tsunami, everyone was free. And now there’s no one?”

“I thought you weren’t interested in another mentor.” The Warden said pointedly.

“I’m not. I’m just wondering what’s going on there.”

“I’m not in the mood for arguing.” The Warden cut him off. “In light of recent events everyone is occupied, and I have more important matters on my hands than getting you the exact report of why. If you have anything relevant to add, state your case now, otherwise please leave my office.”

Tommy opened his mouth but Void shook his head. “That’s all, thank you.” He ducked out of the door as quickly as possible, holding it open for Theseus, letting it swing shut behind them.

“Wow.” Tommy drawled, once it had closed. “Missed that guy.”

Void let out a long breath. “He was having a bad day huh.”

“Nah, he’s just like that sometimes.” He said casually. “You learn to get used to it.”

“You certainly learned one thing from her.” A voice said quietly from next to them. Void squealed in surprise, disappearing into a purple cloud, reappearing five feet down the corridor. The hybrid broke into peals of laughter, one hand over her mouth.

“Aunt Puffy!” Ranboo lit up, using the affectionate nickname most of the apprentices had coined for her. “Hi!”

“I’m sorry, I didn’t mean to make you jump.” He waved it aside, looking embarrassed.

“It’s fine. It’s very easy to do.” She smiled at them both with a kind of sad fondness.

“As I was saying, there aren’t many people who stand up to the Warden like that. Niki always did.”

“You could hear that through the door?” Tommy asked. She looked a tiny bit guilty.

"Maybe? Not much, I just got here." Sure enough, she looked a little out of breath. "I asked him for help a week ago, I wasn't actually expecting to get anyone so I was curious why."

"I bet he's hoping if he pushes us into paperwork we'll get bored and patrol." Ranboo guessed.

"Dickhead." Tommy muttered

"Paperwork isn't all bad." They both gave the Captain a disbelieving look. She gave in with a wry smile. "Alright, fair enough. Come with me." She took the lead back down the corridor to her office. "I'm glad you're back, it's been very quiet here."

"I bet." Void quipped, suddenly much more confident now he was away from that room, and Tommy couldn't really blame him. Even out of armour, the Warden was intimidating.

Less intimidating, was the office now in front of him, Puffy pushing the door open. Every surface was covered with files and notes in a chaotic mess, barely kept in order with dividers and large titles.

"How do you find anything in here?"

"Funnily enough, I actually know where everything is." She sat down at her chair, spinning around, humming to herself thoughtfully. "It just takes me a minute."

"Really?" Void asked. "How do you remember all of it?"

"I've been in charge of putting all our records digitally." She explained tiredly. "That's been why this is such a mess, most of this is already uploaded so I don't care about it too much, once I'm done this will all be so much tidier." She waved her hand vaguely in their direction. "Have a seat, somewhere, anywhere, I don't really have spare chairs." Tommy shoved some papers out of the way, perching on the edge of a cabinet, Void opting to hang awkwardly by the door.

"Did the Warden tell you why I wanted help?"

"He didn't tell us anything," Tommy complained, a little sarcastic.

"He's in a particularly bad mood today, I'm sorry you had to deal with that." She said kindly. "I'm not going to make you fill out forms or anything, although the case I'm setting you might be more difficult. I wouldn't normally hand information like this out but all of my normal staff are busy on the Tsunami case."

Tommy perked up, interested. "Oh? What are we doing?"

"I need information about the other members of the Syndicate. We've put all our focus on Orpheus and Achilles, and our information on the others is very limited." He leaned closer, intrigued, and Ranboo did the same. The Captain noted their interest with a raised eyebrow. "I thought you might like this one."

She turned around, digging around on a shelf, pulling out a large file. "Most of all, we want more about this." She pushed a photo across the table. The photo was blurry, but it depicted a figure in the normal Syndicate black clothes and armour. They were obscured under a dark hood, their mask blank, completely featureless, eerily so, covering their entire face, other than their eyes, but it was too shadowed to make anything out. "They were referred to briefly as Lethe. They were last spotted 9 days ago." The Captain explained. "Close to the area in which Tsunami was killed, which is why I'm now particularly interested in them. Prior to that, they have only been spotted on two separate occasions, so they weren't a high priority, only one of which was with Orpheus and Achilles."

“When was that?”

“A bank robbery three months ago, we kept it very quiet. That was how we isolated them as a newcomer and not one of the original team in disguise, and we didn’t know how to release that information to the public.” She pushed her hair behind her horns to stop it from getting in her face. “We don’t have enough on them yet to be able to.”

“So what do you want us to do, exactly?” Tommy was staring at the picture, trying to make out every detail, what little there was.

“I need you to go through as many files, news reports, anything you can get hold of, and just put it all together in one place, because at the moment information about them is scattered everywhere. Particularly focus on Lethe, see if you can find any information about them, as we haven’t been able to analyse CCTV footage yet, and we need to know what their powers are if they have any.”

“How will we get CCTV footage?” Ranboo queried. “We don’t have access to that kind of thing, so I don’t know how we can help?”

“No please, ask questions.” She encouraged, noticing his hesitation. “That’s what I like to see. I’ll give it to you, the main reason I needed help was because we have hours of footage to analyse for any sign of any of them, most if not all could be useless, and I don’t have the time to sit down and look through it.”

“Is there anything else?” Tommy asked. “Or is that all you have, the photo and the footage?”

“Pretty much. Any information on the Syndicate is immediately public because of it’s nature, so all we have is a few small pieces from cases that have involved us that we’ve managed to hang onto.” She looked slightly annoyed, but it never lasted long. “Again, not much, they know how to cover their tracks.”

“We can take this back to mine right?” Tommy asked hopefully. “Or does it have to stay here?”

“It shouldn’t technically go out of the Tower.” She said slowly, not entirely convinced. “They already won’t be happy about me handing this to, respectfully, kids, but I haven’t really got any choice.”

“I mean you know my mum, we have top-secret stuff at our house all the time, it’s safe.” She shot a look at Void, concerned. “He knows who I am.” Tommy clarified quickly. “We didn’t tell each other, so don’t tell us off, we didn’t break the code or anything, just worked it out by accident.”

Void nodded sagely. “His mum gave me lunch, it was great.”

“Just this once.” She caved without much of a fight. “It’s backed up and if it gets into the wrong hands we’ll have bigger problems on our hands than some missing footage really.” She held out a small hard drive in an evidence bag.

“You’re the best!” Tommy snatched up the files, stuffing them into an offered bag, Ranboo taking the hard drive carefully. “Anything else?”

“That’s all. Go home.” She swept the other files off her desk carelessly. “I’ll see you soon.” They barely waited for her dismissal, slipping out the door, running down the stairs, racing one another.

“Wait for me!” Void called out.

“Maybe!” He ducked into the changing rooms, snatching his stuff up from the locker. It was still light when he got outside, still pulling on his jumper in his haste, waiting out on the steps for Ranboo to catch up. The other boy appeared with a wide grin on his face, bag slung over his shoulder.

“I can’t believe you did that.” He said, pulling Tommy to his feet.

“Did what?”

“You talked us right out of work and back home again.” He looked a little impressed. “I’m never going to complain that you talk too much again.” Tommy’s smile turned mischievous.

“Never?”

There was a suffering sigh. “I shouldn’t have said that.”

“Nope! Takeaway?”

“Sure, we can grab it on the way back,” Ranboo suggested.

“Great minds think alike my friend.” He declared, swinging the bag carelessly, dodging in and out of the bollards. Ranboo opened his mouth, before closing it again.

“I’m your friend?”

Tommy froze mid step, and then back-peddled immediately. “It’s a figure of speech.” He said quickly.

“If you say so.” He didn’t try and fight it, but a small smile played over his mouth. “Friend.”

“Bitch!”

Chapter End Notes

WHT!Mumza my beloved, she's trying her best

[Join the Discord](#)

Also special shout out to ace and itsisi for their shenanigans every time I post, the chaos and comments you two come up with is one of the reasons I'm able to keep so motivated and keep bringing out new chapters every day, it never fails to make me laugh, y'all are the best

Chapter 18

Chapter Summary

A pistol hung in front of him, weirdly distorted, hanging from a piece of thread, and he grabbed it desperately. He yanked at it, trying to pull it free, turning it around as a huge boar skull emerged from the fog, standing far above him.

“Go on Theseus.” The voice said mockingly. “Pull the trigger.” Someone was screaming somewhere far away

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Ranboo set the bag down on the floor, Tommy dragging his duvet off the bed, clearing a space on the carpet. “Right.” He set down a still warm pizza box in the centre, making himself comfortable. “Just sit wherever.”

He was smiling slightly

“What?” Tommy demanded

“I was almost glad to get back. It’s very boring with nothing to do, and then this happens.”

“So that’s why you came and annoyed me every day.”

“Well, it’s the only thing that gets us both out of bed.” He sat down on the chair. “I was actually going to bring cookies today but... kinda turns out I’m not a great cook.”

“Let’s see it,” Tommy said gleefully

The other boy held up his phone sheepishly, showing a photo of a tray of blackened lumps. “I tried.” Tommy snorted, reaching for a piece of pizza, chewing it slowly, leaning across the carpet to grab a file.

“No greasy fingers on the papers,” Ranboo warned him.

“Fuck you I do what I want,” Tommy told him around a mouthful.

“Puffy will be mad at us.” He immediately reached for the tissues, wiping his fingers off before picking it up.

“Okay fair enough.”

“So what have we got.” The other boy slid down next to him, casting his eyes over the papers

“Incident reports, photos, transcripts, a lot of theories, mainly theories.” The pages flicked past his fingers. “Legal stuff, way too much fancy legal stuff. He stopped, going back one, tugging it out a

little.

“Apollo?” Ranboo read the title. “Wasn’t he the one that was killed?”

“Allegedly.” Tommy set it down again, disappointed at the lack of information it held. “But that was just an excuse for the Syndicate to launch more attacks or something.”

“He might have something useful though.” He tried to get a look at the paper Tommy had discarded.

“There’s nothing there. No one knows anything about him, definitely no link to anyone associated with the Syndicate, cos he probably didn’t exist. And anyway, he’s also dead, so there won’t be anything new.” Tommy shifted it over to a pile at the side. “So we’ll put him over there for now, they each get a pile.” He set the Lethe picture down, setting one of Achilles next to it.

“Four, plus we know they have a leader,” Ranboo added. “We just don’t know who.”

“Could be Lethe.” He stared at the photo again.

“We should sort this out first and then start theorising about him.” He suggested. Tommy nodded, taking a stack of paper from him.

“That’s all incident reports, so that can go on the Orpheus and Achilles pile.” He handed them over, and they began to dig through the piles, passing documents back and forth. They worked in silence for a little while, until they had eight neat piles on the carpet, one for each member, and one extra on Orpheus, Achilles and Lethe for sightings of them.

They were rough piles for now, with more waiting in the bag to be sorted but it was a decent portion done. Tommy shifted around, pulling himself down another pillow, starting to feel tired. It had long gone dark outside, he’d lost track of time. Shroud tumbled out of his blanket as he moved, and Tommy picked it up, making it look at him, just sitting there for a few minutes.

“I’m doing this for you.” He whispered. “I’ll find them.” The soft toy didn’t reply, to no one's surprise. He turned it over and over in his hands, eyes clouded with a faint haze of tears.

He didn’t notice Ranboo setting his things aside, leaning forward in concern. “Tommy? Are you alright?”

“Fine.” He replied abruptly.

“You’re crying.”

“I’m not crying.” He insisted. Ranboo tilted his head, moving a little closer

“No no, you were definitely crying.” He rubbed his hands together anxiously. “I don’t really know how to deal with crying people.”

“Me neither. Wooo.” Tommy held out his hand for a shaky fist bump, and the other boy met it with a wry smile. “Pog through the pain, am I right, or am I right.” He wiggled his eyebrows at Ranboo, who just sighed.

“No but seriously. Are you okay?”

“Mmm work stress.” He refused to look at him, staring down at Shroud pointedly.

“You’re not even working right now.” He joked, trying to lighten the mood, and it worked a little, a small smile crossing the other’s expression

“Exactly, cos I’m stressed.” He pulled his blanket tighter around his shoulders, dragging a file over and scanning down a list, running his finger under the text to keep track.

“Tommy.” He tried again. “I don’t know who you’re lying to here, me or you, but you’re not okay.”

“Don’t know what you’re talking about.” Came the stubborn reply

“Do you need help? A hug?” Ranboo paused. “Therapy? Lots of therapy?”

“Fuck off. I don’t do hugs.” He slammed a piece of paper down on a pile with an unusual vengeance.

“No? What if I want a hug?” The other boy switched tactics.

“Weirdo.” He shot back out of habit. The normal jabs didn’t have the same strength behind them, and Tommy sat there for a few moments in the silence after it.

He gave in suddenly, exhausted, flopping against Ranboo’s side. “Fine. You can have a hug, for your sake.”

“For my sake.” Ranboo repeated, fully taken off guard that he’d actually done it. “Yes.”

“Yes.” Tommy leaned against him, resting his head on his shoulder, folding his arms. “You look like you need it.”

“Now what’s that supposed to mean!” He didn’t get a reply, the other boy dragging over his blanket, opting to use him as a pillow in lieu of any further conversation about their emotions, reading through a patrol report.

“You know Niki was trying to get us to talk more,” Ranboo said after a while. “I don’t think this is what she meant.”

“Yaaay. Trauma bonding.” Tommy drawled; half-muffled under his blanket

“Tommy!”

“What?” He poked his head up. “Am I wrong?”

“No comment.”

He tightened his hand around Shroud, hugging it to his chest. “This is kind of a stupid question, but. Do you think it’ll get better?”

Ranboo looked down at him. “I don’t know.” He said finally. “I wish I did, but I don’t. It’s complicated.” Tommy processed this for a few moments and then turned abruptly, burying his head back in Ranboo’s shoulder, tears sliding down his cheeks.

“Not a fucking word.” He mumbled, the words muffled.

“I didn’t say anything.”

“I hate you.”

He nodded agreeably. “That does sound like something you’d do.”

“Fuck you.”

“We can leave this for tomorrow.” He offered. “You don’t have to do this now.”

“I want to.”

Ranboo wrinkled his nose thoughtfully, before reaching for his bag, slinging it over his shoulder. “It’s getting kind of late honestly, I should go. I’ll see you tomorrow.”

“You’re already leaving?” Tommy protested, sitting up.

“As I said, it’s late, and I don’t want to walk back that late. Plus you’re tired, and if I don’t go you’ll just stay up.”

“Bitch. I don’t need a sleep schedule.”

“Well, I do.” He ducked under the doorframe. “I’ll see you tomorrow. Get some sleep, alright.”

“Sure. Whatever. Turn the light off.” A hand snaked back around the door, hitting the light switch before waving him goodbye, disappearing.

He sat in the dark for a while, the room suddenly very empty and far too quiet, staring at the faces of the Syndicate. His eyes began to close, and he slumped back, head resting against the wall.

“I’m sorry.” A voice echoed above him. “But you made this necessary.”

As he adjusted, he found himself in a dark room, with blank walls, floor, and ceiling, no furniture, no door. No entrance or exit at all. Then he was falling, through solid concrete, head over heels. Open space opened beneath him. He was scrambling, trying to right himself, but he couldn’t move, a void opening up beneath him.

He stopped suddenly in mid-air, hanging from thin threads, dangling over the dark sea beneath. The thread tightened around his wrists, around his throat, and he struggled blindly. They snapped without any warning, and the darkness rushed up to meet him.

He braced himself, but there was no painful impact. Instead, his feet slammed against stone, surrounded by a white mist, on an open street. The fog thickened, and then he was running blindly through it, only instead of last time where there had been something on the other side, safety waiting for him behind the patrol cars, there was nothing here. It was never-ending, a looming figure lurching closer and closer, a long shadow falling across him.

A pistol hung in front of him, weirdly distorted, hanging from a piece of thread, and he grabbed it desperately. He yanked at it, trying to pull it free, turning it around as a huge boar skull emerged from the fog, standing far above him.

“Go on Theseus.” The voice said mockingly. “Pull the trigger.” Someone was screaming somewhere far away, echoing as if down a long tunnel, and the dream broke. He shot up, heaving in deep lungfuls of air like his life depended on it, scratching his duvet away from himself.

He’d fallen asleep on the floor, trapped in his blanket, drenched in sweat. His throat was raw, and his ears were ringing.

“Tommy!” Kristin burst in, hitting the light switch, looking around frantically. He winced, turning away slightly.

“Hey?”

“I heard yelling.” She calmed a little, seeing he was safe. “You worried me there for a minute.”

“Bad dream. I’m fine.” He groaned, rubbing his eyes, hauling himself up. “Shouldn’t sleep on the floor.”

“No, you really shouldn’t.” She glanced around at the mess on the carpet but said nothing, helping him over. “Do you want me to bring you anything? Hot chocolate, a water bottle?”

“I’m alright thanks.” He mumbled. “Go to sleep.”

“If you’re sure.” She said carefully, switching the light back off. “Night sunshine, sleep well.”

The moment the door shut, he sat up, already knowing he wouldn’t be able to sleep again after that, badly shaken. He sat back down, poring over the files again, throwing himself into it so he didn’t have to even think about what just happened

Ranboo didn’t ring the doorbell anymore, he just let himself in, trotting upstairs, poking his head around Tommy’s door. “Afternoon?”

“Hello Ranboob.”

“Are we not over that?” Tommy didn’t look up. His floor was covered with sheets of paper again, blurred photos of the few times Lethe had been caught on camera scanned, and expanded to full size, zoomed in on their mask, newspaper articles, everything they’d left to sort later in a cluttered pile around him.

“Have you slept?”

“Yes.”

“Liar.” Ranboo sat down next to him, folding his legs, casting his eye over the floor. “You’ve been busy. Are we working already?” He held up a DVD case. “I bought a new show.”

“This one better not be shit like the last one.”

“It wasn’t that bad!”

“I think we’d better get started,” Tommy said glumly. “If it’s CCTV footage there’s going to be a lot.”

Tommy scrolled through the folders, a growing feeling of dread in his gut. "It's just hours and hours of absolutely nothing." He pressed his hands against his head. "This is going to be pain."

"We'll split it 50/50." Ranboo reasoned. "We just need to cover the days around Syndicate activity, so that helps us a bit."

It didn't help much. She had failed to tell them just how much was on the drive, weeks worth of non-stop footage from cameras all around the city in key locations prior to Syndicate attacks. Most were utterly worthless, hours of nothing or just no one of importance, but he couldn't skip it just in case.

He resorted to watching it on two times speed, and even then it took hours just to work through a few days of footage, even skimming over the parts they knew were clear. They spent the next few days trawling through folder after folder of footage, all with no luck.

Now and then one would stop, turning to show the other a funny video, some foxes in a trashcan, a group of lost drunks, or something completely random, it helped to break up the monotony, but foxes weren't what they were looking for. It was like searching for a needle in a haystack, and just as fruitless.

It was midday of the third day of watching, when Ranboo finally pulled his headphones out, waving his hand to catch Tommy's attention. "I think I found something. Just before the mall attack."

Tommy leaped up, running over, commandeering his laptop. The video was a little blurry, but not bad, all things considered, showing Orpheus and Achilles out in an alleyway, talking to one another. Most of the conversation was far too quiet to be picked up, little more than a hum of static. Tommy slumped back, defeated. "That's not much use."

"I don't know." Ranboo leaned forward, trying to reclaim his laptop, but Tommy yanked it away. "Rewind that." More static. "I could have sworn I heard something."

"I'll turn it up." Tommy said doubtfully. He tilted his head to one side listening. His grip on the laptop tightened suddenly

"Anything?" Ranboo prompted.

Tommy nodded, intent. "Do." He rewound again. "Do you want to.....tell the...thane...thanatos that we failed to...."

"Failed to what?"

"I can't tell." Tommy took his headphones off, brow furrowed. "The rest was too quiet to make out. Is there any more?"

"They leave, and then come back, but there's nothing, I checked. Thanatos." Ranboo frowned. "Is that a name?"

"It sounds like one." He agreed. "I mean I might have heard it wrong, but it sounds like a Syndicate name. It's dramatic enough."

"The others are a mythology thing." Ranboo stood up, taking a look at the bookshelf. "Do you have any mythology books?"

Tommy snorted. "What do you take me for? A nerd?"

"Thanetos, Thanatos." He turned the words over in his mouth. "Can I have my laptop back?" He handed it over. He typed something in. "He's from Greek mythology, spelled with an a." Ranboo scanned the webpage. "That can't be a coincidence."

"I should ask Techno about this." Tommy mused. "He'd know."

"Huh?"

Tommy waved his hand. "Guy who goes to the bookstore I work in a lot, he knows this stuff." He began to smile. "Puffy's going to love us." He said gleefully. "We're legends."

"We can't prove anything."

"That has to be it! We've found nothing, I'll take anything we can get."

"Well, can we get anything useful out of that?"

"It sounds like they were going to report back to him." The realisation dawned slowly. "Oh my god. You know what this means." He snatched up a piece of paper, scribbling the name down onto it, sticking it onto the centre pile, the smallest of them all, for mentions of the Syndicate's leader. "I think we found something!"

"Let's not let it go to our heads?" Ranboo commented, still studying the bookcase.

"Two kids won't find anything he said." Tommy crowed, waving the drive at him. "Bitch we're gods!"

He laughed softly. "I don't think one name is worth a god complex."

"Are you kidding me! The Enforcers don't have this shit, the government hasn't found this, we found it!" He boasted "We did it."

"Yeah, that's great."

"How are you not excited!"

"I don't want to get off track," Ranboo explained. "Let's see what else we can find, and then we can take it all at once. If we get distracted now we'll never get back on track."

Tommy sobered, sitting back down in front of his screen, but he could barely concentrate, his mind flying.

A couple more hours went by with no more luck, other than a few scenes too blurred to offer anything useful. He was about to give up, when Ranboo yanked his headphones out suddenly, looking at his communicator screen. "There's been a suspected Lethe sighting."

Tommy sat up. "What?"

"Puffy just called it in, Blaze and Android are zeroing in on it now."

Tommy scrambled to his feet, running over. "Show me."

“There’s not much to see.” He angled it towards Tommy so he could read the alert.

“That’s like ten minutes from here.”

Ranboo grabbed his wrist. “Don’t even think about it.”

“But...”

“We’re not on duty, Blaze and Android are going, we’ll just get in the way. I don’t want to get in trouble.”

“Why are they here?” Tommy said slowly. “Why this far out from the main city, what are they doing?” He glanced back at the memory stick. “You don’t think they...”

“There’s no way they know,” Ranboo said, but he sounded uncertain all of a sudden.

“I know we said we’d wait,” Tommy said carefully. “But I say we get this back to the Captain as soon as possible.” He suggested. “Maybe I’m being paranoid, but I don’t like this.”

“I mean I don’t think that’s necessary.”

“What’s the harm. We can drop off everything we’ve sorted as well so we have more space.” He reasoned.

“Fair enough.” He stood up slowly, stretching. “I’ll go grab my things.”

“Aunt Puffy?” They knocked on the door, Void poking his head inside. The Captain looked up.

“I’m a little busy at the moment, can it wait...oh it’s you two, back already?”

“We found something.”

“Can you give me a minute?”

“It’s kind of important.” Tommy said.

“That’s why we came, they were very close to where we were.” Ranboo said. “I thought it would be fine but we just wanted to make sure.”

“No one knows you have that outside of myself and the Warden.” Ranboo shot him a look that just said see, I told you so.

“Does the name Thanatos ring any bells?” Tommy asked, ignoring him. The Captain frowned.

“Can’t say it does. Why?”

“Orpheus and Achilles, just before the mall attack, the 2nd from the left camera in the alleyway outside, at about 11:15am.” He pushed the notes over to her. “They discuss reporting back to a Thanatos. We couldn’t find any other mention of the name at all, it’s all we have, but from what we saw it sounds like he’s a leader of some kind, if not the head of the Syndicate, it’s something right?”

“I don’t know how much you can get out of a name really.” Ranboo said apologetically. “But we tried, a lot of it is guesswork.” She took the notes, reading through them, whistling slowly.

“I’m...genuinely impressed.” She admitted at last. “I really wasn’t expecting anything, I knew I should have checked those tapes earlier.” Tommy beamed, pushing Ranboo’s arm.

“We did good.”

“Well done.” She cast an eye over the sorted papers, running a hand through her hair. “I think I can take the rest from here.” Tommy’s good mood faded instantly.

“Oh no, does that mean we have to go back to work now?”

“For this. You can have a few quiet days.” She winked at them. “I have a few more documents for you to sort through but it isn’t much.”

“For real?”

“You have just saved me so much work.” The relief was evident in her voice. “Not only that, but I might actually be able to convince him I need extra hands to sort through all this, who knows what else is in here.”

“I can help.” Void volunteered quickly.

“I don’t normally get so much enthusiasm for sorting files.” She teased him gently. “Are you feeling alright.” He went a bit red.

“I. I like it. Paper doesn’t ask awkward questions; I can just put my headphones in and get on with it.” She gave him an understanding look.

“Alright. I’ll let you know if I need anything. And remember, don’t talk to anyone about this. Understood?” They both nodded solemnly. “I’ll see you around.”

Chapter End Notes

Oh y’all didn’t think I’d make it that easy for you

Also where are y’all coming from, there was no one and suddenly there’s tons of new people, it’s scary

anyway lore chapter pog:)

A polar bear, for some....reason

Chapter Summary

“What’s so funny?” Tommy demanded.

“I know some guys who can do some mean tax fraud,” Techno said, straight-faced.

Chapter Notes

THIS IS AS FAR AS IVE CURRENTLY GOTTEN WITH THE REWRITE

Hence Chayanne’s character is no longer replacing Wilbur’s, sorry for the confusion, I am working on it

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

“What do we do now?”

Void yawned. “I’m going to head back to mine I think. I’m getting tired.”

“Can you get back safely?” They headed down the stairs.

“I can teleport, I’ll be fine.” Void reassured him, “Worst case scenario if the Syndicate really were after us, I’ll just disappear and you’ll never have to hear from me again.” He added, far too casually.

“That’s a bad thing stop saying it like it’s fine!” Tommy stared at him, stunned. “Why are you chill with that?”

He shrugged. “I mean what am I going to do?” He said bluntly. “I can teleport, and I can punch stuff, sometimes. I’m not like you, or Tsunami, I’m useless in a fight except as back up, you could stand a chance, I would not.”

“You could literally teleport out.”

Ranboo gave up, backtracking quickly. “Nothing’s going to happen to me, that was a joke.”

“Yeah, not a very funny one.”

He smiled awkwardly. “I mean, you’re the one who said cope with humour.”

Tommy opened his mouth to say something else, but then gave in. “Yeah. Actually. Fair enough.”

They hung around outside for a while, talking back and forth about little things, neither in a big rush to leave. Puffy came down the stairs a little later looking pleased. She waved at them, walking over. "I was hoping to catch you two before you left."

"Is everything alright?" Void asked.

"Yes, it's great actually, I've relayed everything you told me, he's very pleased with it. I also told the Warden you two were working well together." She told them. "She had a suggestion."

"What?" Tommy asked.

"Seeing as neither of you are open to a new mentor and we don't have them free, and you aren't open to patrolling alone, he suggested you two partner up for patrols when you get back, you'll cover a slightly larger area to compensate but it should work."

Void's eyes lit up. "I mean. I wouldn't mind."

"I. I'm not sure," Tommy admitted. Void's expression fell very slightly, barely visible behind the mask, and quickly covered. "It's not about you, exactly. Niki was the only person I ever patrolled with, cos I always knew she had my back, so having someone new would be....weird."

"Give it some time." The Captain offered. "Think it over, you don't have to give your answer now."

"I should head out." Void said awkwardly. "I'll see you around?"

"Sure." Tommy couldn't quite meet his eyes, staring at the carpet as he walked away

"He's a good kid," Puffy told him gently. "I trust him, you can too."

He shrugged. "I don't mind him. I just don't like change."

She nodded, understanding. "If you need anything, you come to me, alright? We're here for you."

"Thank you." He settled a little, feeling a bit better, the motherly hybrid just had that effect on people.

"I'll leave you alone now." She said, winking at him. "You must be tired of my nagging." She patted him on the shoulder, trotting off again, and he turned away, wandering into the canteen.

It was empty, the hatch closed, it was getting late. He slid onto a table by the window, looking out over the city, pensive. On a good day they could see for miles, their vantage point on the hill leaving the city spread out at their feet, and at night it was all aglow with light.

Even from here, the grim white floodlights of Pandora were visible, isolated in the midst of the darkness of the abandoned district around it, the prison itself a dark void. He stared at it for a while, almost transfixed by it, despite the odd feeling the sight of it left behind.

There was a sound behind him and he started, tearing his gaze away. He turned to find Android standing nearby, looking out over the view with him. "Hello Theseus."

“Hi Jack.” He acknowledged him. Jack folded his arms, switching off his earpiece.

“It’s a been a while. What’s been going on with you?”

“What do you think has been going on with me?” Tommy asked sarcastically. “Like take a wild guess.”

“Well excuse me for trying to start a conversation.” He retorted. “I forgot how delightful you are to talk to.”

“What do you want?”

“I don’t want anything,” Jack said, a little irritated. “I was just concerned. You’re such a familiar face in the tower and then you’re gone. I thought you were supposed to be back a few days ago.”

“I was.” Tommy agreed. “But I talked the Warden into just letting me do paperwork.”

“You need to get back eventually. I mean I’m getting on with my life.”

“Good for you.” Tommy turned away. “You’re a robot, I can’t imagine it bothers you.”

“Half robot,” Jack said stiffly. “Wasn’t my choice. That doesn’t mean I don’t feel emotions dickhead, that’s a part of my head they didn’t really mess with.” He sighed heavily. “Look. I despise you kid, you’re a goddamn nuisance, but I miss her too.”

“Cool. You weren’t there, don’t tell me how to deal with it.”

“Fine.” He said. “Maybe that wasn’t the best way of putting it. Forget I said anything.” He turned away. “All I wanted to say is if you ever feel they might be coming back for you, let me know. We might not see eye to eye on things but I’m not losing anyone else, No one protected her when it was clear she was in danger, I won’t let the same happen to you.”

He left without another word, not even looking back, and Tommy watched him go, not quite knowing how to feel.

The door swung open, sending up a draft that swept through the documents, sending them flying. Tommy cried out in indignation, scrambling after them, Kristin giving them a funny look.

“Come on. We’re going to go see Phil again.”

“Wait what?” He sat up, confused

“You need to get out of your room.” She leaned against the door frame. “You’ve been staring at documents all week, your eyes will go rectangular at this rate.”

“What’s that got to do with seeing Phil.”

She held up her phone. "He texted me to say he and his boys were going to a coffee shop near the mall later and did we want to come."

"Okay? You can go, I can stay here."

"It's an invitation to both of us." She replied patiently. "And you need to start getting to know people outside of work."

"You mean you want to start getting to know people outside of work." He replied snappishly. "I want to stay here."

"I'm not letting you just waste away in your room." She said firmly. "Come on. You need to see the sun now and then."

"You need more friends."

"I have Ranboo." He said automatically, before realising what he said. "He'll do I guess."

"He's not here, you can't lie to me." She said, amused. "And you could do with more than that."

"My own mother just called me friendless, can't fucking believe this." He joked.

"Get dressed." She told him. "We can argue about this in the car."

"I didn't even say I wanted to go!"

"I wasn't asking." She leaned over, ruffling his hair fondly. "It'll be good for you."

"Don't believe you but whatever," He picked himself up anyway, getting changed, muttering to himself all the while

Phil was waiting for them outside the restaurant, which was tucked away on a little corner street, his younger son in tow.

"Child!" Wilbur waved enthusiastically at him. Tommy burrowed down into his hoodie, trying to ignore him. "I know you can hear me."

"Hello Tommy." Phil welcomed him, ignoring his son with the ease of long practice. "How are you?"

"Good." Was all he got in short reply. Kristin glared at him, going straight for a hug.

"It's lovely to see you again Phil."

"And you." He shivered slightly. "It's cold out here, come on in, Techno's waiting for us inside."

He stepped back, holding the door open for them, leading them over to a table at the far end. Techno gave them a nod, and a gruff hello, mostly keeping to himself. Wilbur sat opposite Phil, Kristin next

to him, Tommy on the end of the table, trying to stay as far out of reach as possible.

“I’m sorry for the short notice.” Phil was saying. “I just had some good news and the boys wanted to celebrate.”

“Oh?” Kristin said, intrigued. Phil set down his glasses.

“I’ve signed the last of the agreements, my company is now solely in charge of rebuilding City Hall, under government contract.”

“Oh really? That’s amazing news.” Kristin said warmly

“They took your suggestion into account apparently, so I partially have you to thank.”

“That’s brilliant. We should get something to celebrate.”

“Wait Tommy, I have a new bookshop I want to show you,” Techno said suddenly. Tommy looked over at him curiously. Techno looked back at him. He glared back and Techno glanced at Wilbur, who blinked, processing that exchange slowly, realisation dawning.

“Oh yeah.” Will grabbed Tommy’s wrist. “Come on, you’re going love it.”

“I’m going to hate it.” He warned. “Philllll get him off me.”

“Wilbur be nice.” Phil chided.

“It’ll be fine, we’ll have him back soon.” He dragged Tommy to his feet. “Have fun!”

“We’ll see you in a bit.” Techno chimed in.

“Let go of me.” He yanked his wrist out of Wilbur’s grip. “What was that about?”

“Let’s be honest, as much as we like you annoying you, people don’t normally go around inviting some random kid and his mum out for dinner.” Techno’s voice was dry, a slight smile on his face. He nodded towards the window, and Tommy turned to find Kristin had slid into Wilbur’s abandoned space almost without thinking, now sitting opposite Phil.

“Even if they haven’t worked it out yet, we have,” Wilbur grinned. “Mission success. It’ll take them a while to realise we aren’t coming back.”

“Wait we aren’t?”

“Techno you’re thick as bricks.”

“I think that was uncalled for.” The elder replied, looking dramatically wounded. Wilbur slapped him on the arm, snatching his wallet from his pocket.

“Thanks for offering to pay.”

“Pay for what?” Tommy’s head turned back and forth between them, a little lost.

“Whatever we like.” Wilbur strode off ahead, leading the way triumphantly.

“Ignore Will,” Techno said quietly, taking a bit of pity on him. “He just doesn’t know how to be nice to people.”

“Doesn’t seem like he wants to either,” Tommy muttered. He dodged around a planter, digging his hands deeper into his pockets.

“Well, he likes you,” Techno noted. “By that I mean, he’s polite to people he doesn’t like, so you must have grown on him.”

Tommy’s expression morphed into one of horror. “I don’t know which I hate more!”

“Understandable.” He glanced down at his phone. “Will, it’s dad. He wants to know how long we’ll be so he can order food.”

“Say Tommy’s taking a long time,” Wilbur suggested innocently. “So they can go ahead and order without us.”

“And what if I don’t agree to set my mum up with some old man.” Tommy interrupted hotly.

“Tommy, they have been making eyes at each other for weeks, you’d have to be blind not to see it.” Techno pointed out. “Even I noticed, and I am, as my brother so kindly put, thick as bricks.”

“Why’d you have to bring that up.” Wilbur complained.

“You said it, not me.”

“I don’t like this.” He said uneasily. “This is all weird.”

“Tommy, Tommy, Tommy.” Wilbur spun on his heels abruptly, putting his hands on Tommy’s shoulders. “You’re just not looking at this the right way.”

“There is a right way to look at some random guys setting their dad up with my mum?” He asked. Wilbur waved his hands dismissively.

“Hear me out, this begins your training in crime. Rule one, parental distractions are the number one key to success.” He explained.

“I can’t really do crime, I’m...” He stopped himself just short of outing himself as a hero in training, floundering for something else to say.

“You what?”

“His mum’s the chief of police dumbass.” Techno saved him moments later. “What the hell do you expect, he won’t take well to crime training.”

Wilbur’s smile widened. “Great, get out of jail free card.”

“That’s not how that works.”

Wilbur sighed, realising his cheerfulness wasn’t really resonating with his audience of one. “Fine. Not actual crime, don’t worry.”

“I mean we can do that too if you want to.” Techno added. Wilbur sniggered at some kind of inside joke.

“What’s so funny?” Tommy demanded.

“I know some guys who can do some mean tax fraud,” Techno said, straight-faced.

“You what now?”

“Oh come on Tommy. We’re rich, we’ve seen tax fraud everywhere.” Will said casually. “You should be glad you weren’t at that ball, you should have seen the people there, they were awful, I swear I heard a group of them talking about overseas accounts, in public.” He rolled his eyes in disdain. “They were so obnoxious; I almost understand why someone put a bomb in there.”

“Will!”

“What?” He grinned. “It didn’t kill us, so I can joke about it.” For once, Tommy decided to keep his mouth shut. Techno gave him a sympathetic look.

“I’m sorry about him, he’s in a chatty mood tonight.”

“What are we doing?” He tried to change the subject. “Are we just standing here?”

“I don’t know. What do you normally do?” Wilbur asked.

“Go to the arcade.”

“We can go to the arcade.” He offered. “It’ll be quieter this late.”

Tommy mulled it over. “There’s a polar bear I really want.” He said longingly. “So maybe.”

“Then get it?” Wilbur suggested. “We can play arcade games for a bit.”

“It’s a lot of tickets.” He said mournfully, thinking it over. “Plus Kristin wouldn’t let me last time we came because she didn’t want to carry it around, and I don’t really want to carry it around.”

“Fine. I decide where we go.”

Wilbur began to drag him around, from shop to shop, and he stopped trying to protest, firstly it did nothing, and secondly the older boy clearly enjoying himself immensely. It was hard to resist that for long.

They lost Techno at some point, but he barely noticed, Wilbur drawing his full attention with a constant stream of chatter about this and that, examining an old piece of jewellery in a thrift shop, informing him about the making of soap, anything and everything that came to his mind, how to bind a book, how people used to make ink, even little facts about old languages, if he saw something he said it.

He slowed as they went past a slightly more upmarket clothing store, slowing outside the window, looking at a coat on a mannequin in the display. He scanned Tommy up and down appraisingly. "It could suit you."

"No thanks. I hate clothes shopping." He said immediately. "We can do everything else, just not clothes shopping."

"No?" Wilbur asked, aghast, before an evil smirk followed it. "Actually, I don't know why I'm asking, I can see that."

"Fuck you bitch." Came the instant response. Bony fingers latched around his wrist and Wilbur dragged him inside, ignoring his protests. He yanked a tan sweater out of the pile, holding it up against Tommy thoughtfully. "It suits you."

"My hoodie is better."

"Yes but it's wornnn." He complained. "Which I know, means comfy, but also you need a proper wardrobe."

"Who says I don't have one." He retorted. "You've only seen me like 3 times ever."

"You just told me you hate clothes shopping." He pointed out. "I can make guesses. And with the way Phil and Kristin are hitting things off, we'll be seeing each other plenty more." He hummed thoughtfully, grabbing a shirt. "And next time we might not escape having to have dinner, so you need new clothes."

"I can't pay for this."

"That's okay, I will." Wilbur promised, "On one condition."

"Absolutely not." Tommy was already heading for the door. He was dragged back, digging his heels into the floor.

"You haven't even heard my terms yet. Just let me style you, that's all."

"I'm not here for your entertainment."

"I haven't been able to style anyone for ages." He began to dig through the racks. "Everyone I know has clothes, or a style or something, and I can get bits and pieces here and there but you, you're a blank slate, let me do this."

"Are you actually giving me a choice?"

“Not really.”

Tommy folded his arms defiantly. “You can’t make me.”

“Actually, technically I can. I’m just not going to.” He said with an odd note to his voice. “Besides, I’d much rather you just agreed and we’d both feel much better about this.”

“I won’t!”

Will shrugged, a small pile already gathering over his arm. “You win some, you lose some. What size are you?”

“If I don’t tell you, you can’t get me anything.” He said triumphantly.

“I’m asking as a formality, I already know.” He showed the tags of the clothes, all the same size, and Tommy’s face dropped, realising he was right.

“You’re just doing this to flex that you’re rich.” He accused. “It’s fucking weird.”

“No. We didn’t always have money.” Wilbur admitted. “Dad worked so hard to get here, so I’m in this weird place where I’m very hyper-aware of my money, so I just make jokes about it, which might give off the wrong idea.”

“I’m adopted.” He said bluntly. “So, I only really had this kind of thing when I first started living with Kristin, I’m not really comfortable with it.”

“Me too.” Wilbur held the jumper up against him. “And Techno. We have that in common.”

“You’re not actual brothers?” Tommy was genuinely surprised. “I wouldn’t have guessed.”

Wilbur wrinkled his nose, holding another shirt up against Tommy’s chest. “No, we’re ‘actual’ brothers. I’ve known him for so many years now, and we’re better brothers than most ‘real’ brothers ever could be.”

Tommy pulled a face. “Ew. Sappy.”

“Don’t be like that, Techno’s great. He’s just a gentle giant, once you get to know him.” He said fondly. “Not that I’d ever say that to his face, unless I really wanted something.”

“You’re both nerds, I’m not scared of you.” Tommy declared. Wilbur’s eyes crinkled up.

“No? Anyway, which ones do you like?”

“Uh, I wasn’t really paying attention.” He admitted finally. Wilbur raised an eyebrow and then shrugged.

“Oh well, I wasn’t going to take your opinion into account anyway.” He picked out a few pieces, holding them up. “These ones.” He decided.

“You really don’t have to.” He made one last-ditch attempt, already knowing it was falling on deaf ears.

“But I really want to.” Wilbur pushed Tommy’s hand aside. “And I’m not losing this argument, or any argument actually, I don’t like losing. I’m a sore loser, so just let me have this one.” He picked them up. “Wait for me outside, I’ll be along in a minute.”

Tommy gave in, wandering back out, hovering awkwardly by one of the planters. It didn’t take him long, Wilbur striding out a few minutes later holding a bag. “There we go?”

“Done now?”

He nodded happily, looking very pleased with himself, somewhat akin to a smug cat. “I’m done. Wait a minute.” He glanced around, suddenly realised they were down a member. “We’ve lost my brother.”

“Yeah that happened a while ago.” Tommy drawled.

“Hold on.” He pulled out his phone, jabbing in a number. “Techno hurry up, we’re leaving.”

“Give me a minute,” Techno grumbled down the line. “I’m on my way.”

“Where are you?”

“In the arcade.”

“We’ll meet you halfway.” He ended the call, striding down the centre of the mall, Tommy in tow, bag swinging from his hand. A white shape was making its way down the escalator, held in the arms of a slightly disgruntled-looking Techno.

“There you are!”

“Alright, need to keep nagging me, Will.” His voice replied from behind it. Tommy’s eyes widened.

“Wait a minute, it that....?”

“Here you go, kid.” Techno said gruffly, holding the polar bear out. “That’s the one you wanted right?”

“Techno you’re the best!” The words were out of his mouth before he even thought them through, wrapping his arms around the bear. Wilbur gasped dramatically behind him, pressing a hand to his heart.

“Techno! How could you! I was just getting him to like me.”

“I take it you like it?” He asked awkwardly, ignoring his brother.

Tommy beamed at him in affirmation. “How did you do that?”

He shrugged nonchalantly. “I have good aim.” It was nearly as big as him, he struggled to keep it off the ground, trailing after the brothers.

“Just give it to Techno to carry, he doesn’t mind,” Wilbur suggested

“You’re mean,” Tommy said stubbornly. “I’m carrying it.”

“I like you,” Techno said dryly. “Do you think your mum will notice if we swap you out? I’m getting tired of Wilbur, and I bet you are too.” They fell back a little, Wilbur striding ahead again, coat flying out behind him.

“He’s not that bad.” Tommy admitted slowly. “He’s kind of growing on me.”

“He does that. Like a weed.”

“Just like that.” He pressed his face against the soft fur of the giant toy in his arms. “Thank you, but the way.” He said finally. “I almost forgot to say.” Techno patted him on the head

“You’re welcome kid. Thanks for keeping Wilbur entertained for me, I enjoyed the peace and quiet.”

“Oh fuck you!” He ran ahead, trying to catch up to Wilbur. Techno’s laughter followed him, a warm chuckle that echoed after him, and try as he might he couldn’t stop a slight smile from spreading across his face.

He clung onto the bear tighter, speeding up, stubbornly refusing to admit what was more than clear to anyone else, that he was starting to enjoy their company.

Chapter End Notes

WHT!Neopolitan trio my beloved

Definitely not posting this at 5am my time no no. So if you see editing mistakes, no you didn’t

Also where on earth did you all come from, there’s so many of you now, thank you so much for all the support, I love reading all your theories and comments so much, it makes my day. Also there’s quite a few of you now with theories and people are arguing back and forth over new chapters and stuff, so I’m kind of tempted to make a Discord server if anyone’s interested, just for fic writing in general but with a few channels to discuss new chapters and that kind of thing if anyone would want that. It probably wouldn’t happen for a bit, but it might be fun. Just throwing it out there

UPDATE: We have a discord now! - [Join the Discord](#) .

We have screaming, theories, screaming theories, updates, my rambling, funny memes and writing advice

Chapter 20

Chapter Summary

“Uh, Tommy.” He said after a little bit.

“What?” He looked up irritably. Ranboo pointed at the TV wordlessly, which was currently muted, but there was a breaking news headline splashed across it. The camera zoomed in shakily, showing two very familiar figures wearing all black, white masks covering their faces, standing in the town centre. Tommy’s fork fell to his plate, food forgotten. “Oh shit.” He ran over. “What the hell?”

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

His phone began to buzz, and he pulled it out, welcome for the distraction. “Hold on, I’m getting a call.” He turned around a corner, making sure they didn’t see where he went, before picking it up. “Hello?”

“Hi.” Ranboo sounded a little relieved “Where are you? I went to yours and you were out of the house. I thought something had to be wrong.”

“Fuck off.” He grumbled, “I’m being made to socialise. Sorry about that.”

“It’s fine. I’ll just head back home.”

“No please come save me,” Tommy whined. “It’ll be an excuse to get out of this.”

“Where are you?”

“Near the mall, some old guy invited us out for dinner and his kids have been dragging me around everywhere all evening.”

“I mean. I can get there very quickly, but it’s slightly illegal.” He said doubtfully. “If you want me to?”

“Please,” Tommy said vehemently. “They’re not bad but I don’t know how long I can handle socialising for.”

“Alright.” There were a few hurried footsteps. “You know what, it’s dark, I can get away with it.”

“What are you doing?”

“Give me a minute, the call might cut off.” There was a sudden burst of static, and then another, and another. “Alright, I’m outside.” He came back a little bit more breathless.

“Neat trick,” Tommy said admiringly. He turned around slowly. “Where are you?”

“I see you. Hold on.” The call shut off, and he stuffed his phone in his pocket, before spotting a tall figure leaning against a wall by an alleyway a short distance away.

“Ranboo!” The other boy waved, looking out of breath, cheeks flushed. He straightened up as Tommy joined him, doing a double-take.

“What is that?”

“A polar bear,” Tommy said cheerfully. “Techno got it for me.”

Ranboo blinked. “Cool.”

“Hello there.” Wilbur popped up behind him suddenly. “You’re new.”

“Uh, hi?” Ranboo shot Tommy an alarmed look, and he quickly stepped in.

“This is Ranboo. Ranboo this is Wilbur, the son of some rich bloke my mum knows.”

“Hi, random kid Tommy knows, nice to meet you too.” Wilbur declared, holding his hand out with a broad smile.

“Hi, son of some rich bloke Kristin knows,” Ranboo said carefully, taking it. “Nice to meet you.”

“Where did you come from?” Tommy asked Will. “I thought I lost you.”

“Nah, I knew where you were, you looked busy though so I left you alone.” He stuffed his hands in his pockets. “Just came over to say Techno and I have to go and we wanted to check if you knew your way back to the restaurant.”

“I know my way around.” Tommy retorted, slightly offended. “I’ve been here for years.”

Will held his hands up. “Just checking. Oh, and here’s your bag.” He handed it over. “Say hi to Kristin for me?”

“Sure.” He paused. “Thanks.” He held up the bag. “For this. You didn’t have to do that.”

Wilbur patted him on the head. “Now say it like it didn’t cause you physical pain.”

“Shut the fuck up.”

“You’re very welcome, Toms.” He said cheerfully. “Anyway. We’ll catch up soon if you want to?”

“Yeah.” Tommy agreed, surprising himself with his sincerity. “That would be nice.”

“Nice to meet you, and good to see you again Tommy.” He trotted off, yelling at Techno to wait up for him

“You know some odd people,” Ranboo said after a moment's silence.

“I know you.”

“I think I count.” He pushed a weary hand through his hair. “I mean this is as far as I planned the escape, how are we getting back?”

“We’re taking the bus,” Tommy said immediately. “You’re not teleporting back like that.”

“I’ll be good for a few more goes.” He insisted. “I just need to break it up into shorter journeys if I’m carrying someone else.”

Tommy waved the polar bear at him. “With this guy as well?”

“He’s no problem, he hasn’t got vital organs.” The other boy said in a tone far too casual for the subject matter

“That is very ominous. Also, I hate teleporting.”

“I mean I’ve never ‘ported you when we’re not in a life-or-death situation.” Ranboo pointed out. “So it might be better this time.”

“Fine.” Tommy gave in, not really wanting to go all the way to the bus station in the dark. “Just this once.” Ranboo tugged him around the corner, checking for any security cameras.

“Hold on to your stuff tight.” He gripped Tommy’s arm and the ground disappeared from under his feet. The breath surged out of his lungs, and then they were on solid ground again. He heaved in air again, only for it to rush out as they teleported again, and again, hopping across the city. His head was spinning

They landed on his doorstep, and he staggered away, one arm wrapped around the polar bear protectively, the other clutching his stomach, his face a little green.

“Not for you?” Ranboo asked, concerned but a little amused, helping him up.

“Nope.” He felt sick, leaning against the porch. “Let’s not do that again.” He dug his key out of his pocket, shoving the door open, hanging onto the bear tightly, dumping the bag of clothes Wilbur had bought him in his room.

He found himself digging through the fridge, pulling out some leftover pasta, the sickness having lifted a little. “You hungry?”

“I’m good thanks. Do you mind if I get a glass of water?”

Tommy glared at him. “You’re here literally every day, stop asking permission for water, just get it.” Ranboo went a bit red, but he did so.

“I’m hungry. Which is kinda ironic, since we got invited out for dinner.” Tommy said, a slightly annoyed note in his voice. Ranboo raised his eyes to the giant polar bear sat on the chair next to him.

“Right.” He said, not really hearing anything he was saying.

“Uh, Tommy.” He said after a little bit.

“What?” He looked up irritably. Ranboo pointed at the TV wordlessly, which was currently muted, but there was a breaking news headline splashed across it. The camera zoomed in shakily, showing two very familiar figures wearing all black, white masks covering their faces, standing in the town centre. Tommy’s fork fell to his plate, food forgotten. “Oh shit.” He ran over. “What the hell?”

"I don't know."

"They’ve been quiet for nearly three weeks, what the hell?” Tommy stared at the screen.

“That’s how it always is though, isn’t it? They disappear for a month, or two, radio silence, and then something huge, and then nothing. What do we do?”

He hesitated for a moment. “I guess we stay put. Unless we get orders.”

“I thought you’d want to go after them?” Ranboo asked curiously

“Yeah, I do.” Tommy agreed. “But just seeing Orpheus on a screen makes me want to throw up, if I had to face him in real life I would just freeze.” He grabbed the polar bear, hugging it tightly, taking some comfort from the weight of it.

They sat there in silence, watching as Enforcers surged towards them. Orpheus opened his mouth, and they began to fight amongst one another, fists flying. More were spilling out of trucks, fitting ear defenders on, running in to try and break things apart.

Ranboo’s eyes widened suddenly and he signaled for Tommy to be quiet, the communicator strapped onto his wrist buzzing, normally hidden under his sleeve. “Hello?”

“Void?” The Captain’s voice came in over the link. “Do you copy?”

“I copy. Is this about the attack?”

“No. We’ve received a tip-off to a big arms trade happening in district 14. Everyone’s dealing with the Syndicate, it’s only you and Theseus left and I’m contacting him in a minute.”

“No need.” Tommy cut in. “I’m here.” There was a slight pause

“Alright. We’ll fill you both in on the way.” The link shut off and they stared at each other for a moment.

“There goes movie night.”

“Perks of the job,” Tommy said weakly. “Race you back here?” He scrambled upstairs, grabbing his things. He strapped his chestplate on, checking and double-checking his gear, filling his water flask up out of habit.

He stopped himself short. He always brought extra, in case Niki’s supply ran out, he didn’t even think about it. The lump came back in his throat, but he pushed it aside, deciding against pouring it out,

convincing himself it could still come in handy, strapping it to his hip, squish-ing Shroud down into an empty pouch on his belt. "You're coming with me. I can't do this with just the two of us."

Ranboo was already waiting for him, all kitted out, mask on the table. He studied the map on his phone carefully. "I can get us there. I won't be able to get us back."

"That's all we need. Any updates from the Captain?"

"We need to get in, get information on what's happening and leave again." Ranboo relayed. "We don't engage in a fight; we don't do anything to draw attention to ourselves, they shouldn't even know we're there."

"Alright." He held his hand out, bracing himself. "Do the thing."

They landed on an old concrete car park, weeds growing up through the cracks. Ranboo staggered away, a little pale, watching as Tommy circled the building, sizing it up. It was a vast old warehouse complex, still in use, but worn down. There didn't seem to be much in the way of security cameras or anything really, they'd bypassed the barbed wire and security gates already.

"Right, so they're somewhere in here."

"We get information, and get out," Tommy said firmly. "That's all we're here for." Void nodded. "Nervous?"

"A bit." He admitted. "You?"

"Nope. Never been nervous in my life." He replied cheerfully, clearly lying through his teeth. "Are you ready?"

Void adjusted his mask, checking his gear instinctively. "Going to have to be."

"We'll be fine, it's just in and out, check out the situation and wait for backup."

"The doors locked. That's a good start." The nerves were starting to bundle. He'd done this before, not often but he had, only back then he had Tsunami there to steady him, to protect him. Back then he hadn't been able to lead the way, the older heroes going in first, now it was all in his hands, hands that were nearly shaking right now, as much as he tried to cover it up.

There was a small door at the side, a lock covering the door. Void knelt down, studying it for a few moments. "Do you have anything long and thin?"

"Uh, nope, but I can probably find something." He hunted around for a minute or so, before finding a pile of old crates lay nearby, half-fallen apart, the wood damp and rotting. He dug his finger under a protruding nail, tugging at it, drawing it out and tossing it over. He took it with a concentrated expression, narrowing his eyes, wriggling it around for a few moments inside the keyhole. It clicked open and Tommy watched him with a new respect.

"Where the hell did you learn that?"

A slight smile tugged at his eyes. "Ballet."

“Dickhead.”

“You first?” He stepped aside, holding the door open, and Tommy stepped inside warily. It was near pitch black, the lights all off, darkness having long fallen outside, and completely empty. There was another door at the far end, Void striding ahead, testing the handle.

“This one’s locked too.” He reached for the nail again, before stopping. “Wait. You can just take the screws off, right?”

Tommy’s eyes widened a little. “You’re right.” He pressed his hand against the hinges. The screws loosened, cushioned with red light before they fell to the floor with any kind of noise. Void caught it, setting it to the side carefully.

“Weirdest way I’ve ever broken in somewhere.”

“Do you break in places often?” Tommy quipped.

“Sssh I’m concentrating.” They entered another empty room, then a long corridor, no sign of anything. “Hold on, I’m going to take us further in.” Void grabbed his wrist, and his stomach lurched again. This time the warehouse they appeared in was stocked, piles of cans on large pallets, dust settled on top, they looked as if they hadn’t been touched for some time.

“This way. I hear voices.” They crept through a low opening, keeping to the walls, emerging into a large open hall. A metal walkway ran around the roof, bathed in shadow, perfect to hide them as they moved closer, looking below.

The hall was crowded with people, features covered with face masks and balaclavas, most with some kind of weapons. Two trucks had been pulled in, the backs open, with some kind of tarpaulin-covered cargo, a group forming in the centre.

One of the masked figures held out a laptop, another other taking it in some kind of handover, but he couldn’t quite make out what they were doing, the screen angled away from him. There was a tap on his arm. Void pointed into one of the trucks where a tarpaulin had been left uncovered, exposing the cargo.

“Is that?” Tommy’s eyes widened with horror

Crate after crate of weaponry, stacked high with ammunition and god knows what else. Tommy reached for his earpiece slowly, tapping it

“HQ come in. We’re going to need back up.” He whispered. “This is huge.”

“We can’t spare anyone right now, I’m sorry.”

“There are literal crates of weapons being traded.” He hissed. “Everyone here is highly armed, there is nothing Void and I can do. There are truckloads of ammunitions being traded. We don’t have the resources for this.”

There was a slight intake of breath. “I’ll see what I can do, but I can’t make any promises.”

Void tapped his arm to get his attention. "Theseus. The laptop." He whispered. "We have to get it."

"Are you out of your mind?" Tommy shot back. "We'll be killed."

"The information that could have on it could take this whole thing down."

He tried to sit up, and his arm hit a metal pipe, knocking it over with a loud clatter. "Uh. Oh."

All eyes had turned to the top. Tommy pressed his hand against his ear. "Uh. We might need back up sooner than anticipated."

"What happened?"

"They know we're here!" He leapt to his feet, running across the walkway, making no effort to hide himself now.

"Theseus out of there. Now!"

"On it!" He slowed. "Void, the laptop!"

"I see it." Void grabbed onto a piece of rope hanging from the roof, sliding down it, dropping to the floor below, running towards the now abandoned laptop.

Tommy yanked, the case flying up into the air towards him and Void jumped, snatching it out of the air, phasing again to land back ahead of him. "Got it!"

He clung onto it, running ahead, not looking where he put his feet. The rusted metal creaked, and then snapped under his weight with no warning, sending him plunging down towards the floor far below.

"No!" He froze in mid-air, suspended by red, and Tommy lifted him back up, concentrating. "Hold my hand." He reached up grabbed it. "Don't let go."

He yanked him back up, picking his way carefully along, leaning against the wall, hanging on until the stairs. They clattered down, landing on solid ground next to a towering pile of cardboard. It had been left for who knows how long, mould starting to creep over some of the edges. He pulled a face. "I think they have a problem with damp in here."

"This is really not the time." Ranboo's voice was strained, eyes darting over his shoulder

"There they are!"

They backed towards the stack of cardboard Tommy reached for his belt, grabbing a small metal bar hanging from it, flicking it. It expanded into a full-length staff, Ranboo taking his lead

"I feel like staffs vs guns are a little outmatched."

"It's what we've got. If they land a shot on us we're dead either way." A barrage of gunshots rang out. He threw his hand out, covering his eyes, the bullets freezing in mid-air, clattering to the ground. "On your left!"

Void spun around, smacking his staff into the head of a man trying to sneak up on him, wincing at the sound it made against his helmet. He dropped like a sack of potatoes, collapsing on the floor at his feet. "I don't like doing that." He mumbled.

"They are literally trying to kill us!" He reached out, yanking the stack of boxes down in an avalanche. "Go!" His head was starting to pound with how much he was using his abilities. The boxes settled, covering the doorway, but it was a temporary fix, and he couldn't look back

They skidded around a corner, and Tommy slowed, the sounds fading into the distance, slowed by the blockade. "Hold. We gotta work out where we are."

Void shook his head slowly, arms wrapped around the laptop case, out of breath. "Haven't a clue." He raised his head to meet Tommy's gaze, afraid. "How are we going to get out of here?"

Tommy pressed his back against the wall, staring up at the ceiling. "Back up isn't coming. We're going to have to fight our way out of this one."

"We have orders not to engage." Void warned him

"Too late for that now isn't it. Besides, last time I heard that I watched Tsunami get thrown into a wall by Achilles." He said grimly. "It could have been much worse if she didn't fight back."

Their comms crackled, the signal patchy. "You need to get out of there. Backup is on the way, ETA about five or six minutes."

"We are trying." Tommy snapped. His voice cracked a little, and he shut off the link, taking a deep, shaking breath.

"Five minutes. Five minutes is good, we can make five minutes." Void said, sounding more like he was trying to convince himself more than anything. Tommy doubled over

"Give me a minute."

"You alright?"

"Having a bit of a moment. Just...Not again." Theseus whispered. "I can't let it happen again."

Void frowned, and then took a sharp breath. "That wasn't your fault..."

"Don't try and therapise me bitch." He hissed. "I'm working."

He took a deep breath, standing up straight and giving the other meta a brave smile. "If we make it out of here alive, I'll never make fun of ballet again."

"Promise?"

"Promise. Let's go." He took off at a sprint again.

"Split!" He dodged into a side corridor, Void running off the other way, navigating blindly from room to corridor, just trying to lose them in the maze. His lungs were starting to burn, trying to speed

himself up with little bursts of energy, boosting him forward.

A night train rattled by outside, thundering past, and he angled towards the noise, hoping for a way out. The floor was littered with bits and pieces of debris, making footing treacherous, he had to watch his every step, he couldn't afford to fall. He staggered into a small covered courtyard space, looking around anxiously for an exit, footsteps getting closer, spotting a door on the other side, hurtling towards it.

"Don't move!" He spun around just as a gunshot rang out, deafening in the space.

"TOMMY!" The gunman fell, the pistol spilling out of his hand, and Void appeared behind him, staff in hand, eyes wide. Tommy grinned at him.

"You took your time. We gotta get out of here." Void shook his head mutely. "Why are you staring at me?"

"Theseus."

"What?" His ears were ringing, he was straining to hear the other meta, dazed. He moved to sit up, a flash of pain snapping across his front. His hand flew to his stomach, and he looked down. Red was leaking through his fingers.

The door burst inwards almost in slow motion, Void trying to shield them both as bodies poured in, completely surrounding them. Tommy looked up almost comically slowly

"Oh shit."

Chapter End Notes

UPDATE: We have a discord now! - [Join the Discord](#)

We have theories, updates, my rambling, funny memes and writing advice

Chapter 21

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Void moved in front of Tommy automatically, one arm held out to try and shield him.

“They sent heroes after us.” A mocking voice called out. “And not even adults.”

“We didn’t want to be here either.” Void tried. “We just want to go.” The voice stepped out of the crowd, wearing a blue jacket, mask pulled up over his nose and mouth, a beanie pulled down over his hair, oddly out of place amongst the towering armed figures around him. Void backed away, eyes widening.

“Jester?”

“How the fuck do you know my name?” The man hissed.

“Heard it around?” He tried to edge backward, moving in front of the other boy.

“Don’t fucking move.” Jester raised his gun, pointing it at Tommy. “Or I shoot him again.” He snapped his fingers, and one of the men at his shoulder stepped forward, holding a metal bat, coated in barbed wire, a vicious smile behind his mask. Void shrunk down, but he didn’t move an inch.

“We can work this out.”

“If you’ve heard of me, what makes you think I’m going to let you go.” He sneered. “You’ve seen too much already.”

“Void?”

“I’m sorry,” Ranboo whispered. The bat swung towards him, and he didn’t try to move, eyes fixed on the gun aimed right at Tommy.

It never reached him. The bat flew out of his assailant’s hand, out of the door, slamming against the wall, sending plaster pattering down. Another gunshot rang out, and Tommy screamed, clutching his arm, hand still outstretched, the remains of his powers seeping into the ground around the bat.

Void’s eyes widened, but he didn’t hesitate, grabbing Tommy’s wrist, and phasing them both through the wall into a tiny room on the other side. His jumps got shorter each time, he barely managed to get them up to a tiny room on the third floor, but they were away.

“Are we safe?”

“For a minute.” Void agreed, breathing hard, his eyes too wide. There was shouting below, and more running feet, but neither of them could bring themselves to move. Tommy slid down, his head spinning.

“What the fuck? You know that guy?”

“Heard of him.” Ranboo wasn’t looking at him, head tilted, listening intently. “If he’s involved in this we gotta run.”

“You said my name.”

“I panicked. I’m sorry.”

He shook his head. “It’s okay. I’d have done the same.”

“Tommy’s a common name. Right?”

“Not even that, just tell them it’s a nickname for Theseus.” Ranboo looked exhausted, his eyes swollen, face drained of colour. “Told you we should have taken the bus back.” Tommy managed. He squeezed his eyes shut, curling up.

“How bad is it?”

Tommy nodded slowly, his eyes glazed over. “Not that bad yet. Can you jump again?”

Void shook his head, looking dazed. “Not safe. We could teleport into solid rock.”

“Or we can just teleport back out again.”

“If we teleport into a wall we’re dead, instantly.”

“Certain death or probably certain death, I’ll take my chances.” Tommy hauled himself up. “We gotta go.”

“Slow down.”

“I don’t feel it, ’s fine.” His words were starting to slur a little. “We have to keep moving.” Void looped his arm under Tommy’s, holding him up, helping him limp up the stairs. The voices below were getting louder, and he sped up, pulling Tommy along as fast as he could.

“I’m tired.” Tommy was slowing, falling behind even with Ranboo’s support. “I wanna sit down for a bit.”

“You can’t sit down.”

“I want to.”

“You can’t. I’m not letting you die here.” Void looked so pale, pressing his hands to his temples, but he refused to let go. “We’re going home.”

“No one’s going to die,” Tommy said sleepily. Void chewed his lip anxiously, before making his decision.

“You know what, I’m going to carry you.”

“You’re not going to fucking carry me, I can walk.” Ranboo picked him up, carrying him up the stairs, ignoring his protests, which were getting increasingly quieter. The younger boy’s eyes were clouded with tears, his teeth gritted together.

“ETA one minute, where are you?” The Captain called over the radio, her voice crackling as the signal went in and out.

“Theseus is down, I repeat Theseus is down.” Void relayed. “Please say Supreme is with you.”

“She is, don’t worry. What happened?”

“I’ll tell you in a minute, but it’s bad.” He rounded the final curve of the stairs, slamming his shoulder against the door at the top. It wasn’t locked, thank goodness, it opened easily, and he stumbled out onto the roof, staggering out to the centre, sliding to the ground, the other boy sinking down with him, exhausted.

Tommy’s hand was pressed to his stomach, his breathing slow, and irregular. He collapsed into Void’s shoulder, and the older boy wrapped one arm around him, pulling him over. “You’re fine. It’s going to be fine.”

“I know.”

“We’re okay. We’re safe.”

“I know that dickhead.” Tommy muttered

“I’m not really talking to you,” Ranboo admitted weakly

“Who else is there.”

“Me.”

“You’re talkin’ to yourself? ’m right here, I talk for both ‘f us easily.” His speech was slurred together. “I feel much better now. Making fun of you helps.”

“Just keep talking,” Ranboo said softly. “You can make as much fun of me as you like. Keep talking to me, stay awake.”

“Why wouldn’t I?”

“Doesn’t matter.” He said quickly.

“It really fucking hurts..”

“I bet. Just a little longer.” Ranboo tried to reassure him as best he could. The chattering of helicopter blades grew louder. Then it was right there, circling over them, bathing them in a floodlight. Ranboo shaded his eyes, looking up at it, waving at it.

Android dropped down, landing easily on the roof despite having dropped like twenty metres, taking off at a run as it lowered towards them, diving down the stairwell, Blaze followed close behind.

“Boys!” The Captain jumped after them, a dog in a black vest trotting behind her, running over. “What happened?”

“He was shot, in the stomach and in the arm. Where’s Supreme?”

“Hello there.” A painfully cheerful voice called out from behind them. “Someone call for a healing delivery?” Void sunk down in relief as Supreme appeared from behind them.

“Hi.”

“Hello. You got yourself in a bit of a pickle there.” The healer knelt down next to them.

“Please help him first, I’m fine, just some bruises.”

“Are you sure?” Ponk asked. “I mean-.”

“I’m just gonna...” Ranboo held his arms out and the dog flopped into them. “Yeah, I’m good.” He curled up around the dog, hugging her tightly.

“Is he alright?” The Captain asked, concerned. Tommy looked over at his partner critically, still very out of it.

“He has Fran, he’ll be fine.”

“Void?” They got a lopsided thumbs up, in response, Void’s head buried in Fran’s neck. He didn’t move, and Fran seemed more than happy to oblige, making herself comfortable in his lap, resting her head on his arm.

“Get them out of here!” Android called over the comms, “Enforcers are coming in, they want a cleared site.”

“Can you move?” She asked Supreme quietly

“Give me a minute.” Supreme’s hands were hovering over Tommy’s stomach, a warm yellow glow around them. “Alright, he’s stable, but I’m not done.”

A stretcher was pulled out of the helicopter, and he was lifted onto it, the Captain helping Void up, the other meta barely able to stand. Tommy pawed at his arm weakly, leaning off the stretcher as he was set down in the centre. “Void. The laptop.”

“Oh yeah.” It was still attached to his belt, near-forgotten in the chaos. He unhooked it, holding it out to the Captain. “I don’t know what you can do with this, but we snatched it off them, it was involved in the trade.” The captain opened it, brow furrowed, but was met with a blank screen. “I’ll get Android on it. He’ll know what to do.”

“No idea if it’s useful at all. But they saw us and we wanted something.”

“You did well.” She reassured him. “Especially for what you were up against.”

“He’s unconscious,” Supreme reported. “Probably for the best. He’ll be alright though.” The tension left Void’s shoulders, and he sunk back, not faring much better. He managed to take a few sips from an offered water bottle, watching the city lights go past as they flew towards the Tower, before passing out where he sat.

Tommy woke up feeling surprisingly relaxed, white ceiling and bright lights of the medical wing slowly fading into view. Ranboo was sat next to him, out of his uniform, wearing plain black joggers and a hoodie, a normal face mask covering his features. “Good morning.”

He sat up stiffly. “Morning?”

“You’re in trouble.” He held up Tommy’s phone. “Kristin called.”

“Oh shit.” He shot up, and then winced, his hand flying to his stomach. Ranboo’s eyes flashed with worry.

“Are you alright?” He looked around, trying to find something to help with.

“Fine.” Tommy replied, through gritted teeth. He pulled his t-shirt up, examining the bandages.

“It’s mostly healed, she couldn’t do all of it as they’ve been healing the whole agency basically after that fight. But it’s just a basic cut now.” Ranboo explained.

“Then why am I in here?”

“Too complicated to get you home, and they wanted to keep an eye on you after losing that much blood.”

He processed that for a moment. “Shit. Well. When did Kristin call?”

“Straight after we got you here, she got home and realised you weren’t there. Don’t worry, I answered and filled her in.” He said quickly.

“You idiot.” Tommy sunk back down. “That’ll make it so much worse.”

“What was I meant to do? Just let it not answer, let her think something awful had happened or let her know you were hurt but okay?” He reasoned. “Ponk said you were clear as soon as you woke up, she needed to know that.” He hesitated. “But, Tommy.”

Tommy raised an accusing finger, pointing it at him. “You’ve got a serious voice on. I don’t like it. Stop that.”

“We need to talk about..”

“We don’t need to do anything.” He cut him off.

“You literally got shot to save my life.”

The words hung in the air between them. Tommy paused for a moment. “Well. I was already shot so it wasn’t that bad.”

“You could have died!”

“So could you?” He sat back. “I don’t know what I’m supposed to do, let your head get caved in, I don’t know what you want from me.” He said defensively. “I couldn’t just sit there. What if it happened again.”

Ranboo’s eyes widened with understanding. “Oh.” His eyes shone, and he looked away quickly

“Are you crying?” He leaned over, trying to see, but the other boy just turned his head.

“No?”

“Weak bitch.” There wasn’t much venom behind it. Tommy picked himself up stiffly, grabbing a jacket off a nearby chair with the agency logo on it. He pushed the curtain aside, heading for the door.

“Maybe give it a minute.” Ranboo suggested, but he was too slow. Tommy shoved the door open, walking out into the corridor.

“You sent two children into an armed gang fight! Are you out of your goddamn mind!” Blaze’s voice floated up the corridor from the stairs. “And you told no one?”

“Ouch.” Tommy pulled a face. “That doesn’t sound good.”

“You don’t say.” Ranboo agreed. “They’ve been at it for a little while.”

“And you didn’t tell me? I want to see.” He sped up, making a beeline for the main stairway, trotting down them as quickly as possible, Ranboo hovering at his shoulder protectively.

The Warden was stood in the lobby, arms folded, out of his armour but no less intimidating, his trident strapped across his back. Blaze stood opposite him, his hair alight with flames as it tended to when he got angry, fire rushing up his arms. “We didn’t need everyone at that fight! You should have told us, we could have spared one person!”

“As I said, they’re fine, and handled it excellently.” The Warden replied, icy calm. “Just like I knew they would.”

“Theseus was shot!” Spark was hovering in the doorway. He met Tommy’s eyes, giving him a wave.

The fight had drawn a few spectators, the Captain hovering near the back, Android stood on the bottom step. Purpled was perched up in the arches on the second floor, not that Tommy had any clue how he’d gotten up there.

“This job has its risks.”

“You’re not even on the field anymore, you don’t get to say that shit.” Blaze hissed. “You could have easily picked up your damn trident and gone to help them.”

“I have duties here.”

“Yeah send the kids out,” Tommy said sarcastically. “Because the Warden’s duties are more important.”

All eyes suddenly turned to him, and he flushed red. “Sorry, that was a bit louder than I meant it to be.”

“Tsunami would love have to see what we’ve become.” The Warden said icily. “All arguing, making fun of each other, weakening all the work we did to get here and for what.”

“Don’t fucking use her name like that.” Tommy hissed. “You have no right!”

“Theseus isn’t wrong.” Puffy chimed in unexpectedly, a sad smile on her face. “She would have been proud of them for standing up for themselves, whether you like it or not. Don’t make her out to be anything less than she was.”

The Warden tightened his fists, and then loosened them, fixing his gaze on Blaze. “I understand it’s been a tough evening, and morning, but that is not an excuse to lash out at anyone else. I know it’s not easy, we have been struggling to keep up for a while, that’s not news to anyone, we’re understaffed

and underfunded and fighting for our lives to keep going. But you're not the one who has to make the hard decisions around here and it shows."

"What the hell has gotten into you lately." Blaze spat, taking a step closer. The fire flared up, reflecting in his eyes. "First Tsunami, now this, you're not who you were."

"If you have an issue with me, then let's address it like the adults we are, not yelling in the lobby where anyone can see us." The Warden said flatly. "Either come up to my office in a calm and dignified manner, or back down."

"Oh, I'm not done here." The fire on Blaze's arms subsided a little. "But you don't get to hide it away in your office, we'll deal with this at a meeting, and you had better have some fucking good answers by then." The Warden inclined his head serenely, declining to answer him, sweeping past, nodding to the two of them.

"Good work last night." He said quietly. "I'm sorry about everything that happened, but from what Android's gotten so far, it was invaluable." Tommy nodded mutely, not sure what to say, and by the time he got anything together, the other meta was already gone, up the stairs and out of sight.

"Theseus!" Puffy nearly ran over, pushing her hair out of her eyes, pulling him into a hug before he could do anything. "You're finally up."

"You're squeezing me." She let go instantly, like she'd burned her fingers or something.

"Oh my gosh, are you alright?"

"He's being dramatic," Ranboo informed her cheerfully. "He does this."

"I'm sorry." She said, more quietly. "That shouldn't have happened. It's a testament to your skill and teamwork that you both made it out, with little more than scratches and a bullet wound, it could have been so much worse."

"Good luck dealing with him today Puffy," Blaze strolled over. "You're going to have your work cut out for you."

"No thanks to you." She replied, a little snappishly. "He's stressed already, did you really have to make it worse?"

"I've been stressed. I've never once been tempted to send kids to deal with wholeass gangs." He replied flatly, not remorseful in the slightest. "Somehow that's not a normal thing to do."

She sighed patiently. "This isn't worth the argument. I'll see if I can talk to him, try not to make a mess of things while I'm gone." She walked away, and Tommy stared after her.

"Even she disagreed with him. I've never seen that."

"We all know what he did was fucked up."

"Thanks for sticking up for us," Ranboo said quietly

He wasn't looking at them all of a sudden, so they couldn't see his expression. "That could have been my little brother out there. I don't know. He's normally a fair man, but he's become unreasonable lately," Blaze said tiredly. "It happens, he'll come back to us again."

"Imagine being so stressed you send two kids into a gunfight." Tommy quipped.

"It is our job." Ranboo pointed out. "We kinda signed up for this."

"Whether we liked it or not," Blaze muttered. "Which gives even more reasons for us to make fun of him." He drew a hand over his eyes. "Anyway, back to work." He headed off, Purpled and Spark appearing behind him, replacing him.

"You're not dead," Purpled observed

"Nice to see you too."

"Can't believe you got shot." Eryn strode over, a spring in his step. "Did you try just dodging?"

"Oh shit, thanks for that." Tommy drawled, the sarcasm practically dripping off his tongue. "I'll remember that in the future."

"Purpled, Spark. Come on!"

Eryn glanced up, before sighing dramatically. "We're being summoned. Farewell." Purpled raised a hand awkwardly.

"Bye, I guess." He followed Spark off, and Tommy watched them go, his eyes lidded. He leaned against the other boy's side, suddenly tired again, the short trip from the hospital wing exhausting. Ranboo settled his arm around his shoulders a little awkwardly.

"Clingy fucker." Tommy jabbed him in the ribs. Ranboo just sighed.

"You just nearly died on me like 6 hours ago."

"Yeah I was the one that was dying and look at me, I'm not clingy." He waved his other hand around to prove his point

"Tommy you're literally hanging off my arm." Tommy looked at him, and then away, and then back again.

"I just nearly died, I need support to walk."

"Ponk healed you, you're fine."

"Stop arguing with me I'm right." Tommy snapped. "Besides, you nearly had your head caved in."

"But I didn't. Because you got shot."

"Because you jumped out to try and save me. You shouldn't have done that." Tommy told him. "You should have just stayed where you were."

"I have a somewhat limited supply of friends." He said finally. "I'd rather keep them alive, even if one is trying his best to throw away anything resembling self-preservation."

“We’re not friends.”

Void sighed. “You literally took a bullet for me.”

“That means nothing.” He said defensively. Ranboo threw his hands up in fond exasperation, giving up.

“You really should go home. You need rest.” Tommy buried his head in his hands, suddenly switching to despair.

“Kristin’s going to be so mad.”

“Probably has bigger things on her mind to be fair. They did kind of wreck a police station.”

“Movie night?” He asked shakily. “I’m not about to let some fuckers with a gun take movie night again.”

“Sounds good to me.”

Chapter End Notes

UPDATE: We have a discord now! - [Join the Discord](#)

We have theories, updates, memes and writing advice, also featuring my rambling

WHT!Ranboo is a little bit of badass and I love him, he’s just trying his best. I had a lot of fun making his character, he’s like origins smp ranboo and dsmp ranboo got stuffed into one person. Their entire friendship is just extrovert adopts introvert but it was the introverts plan all along so he could hide behind him.

song for this chapter is Brother, by Kodakone

Chapter 22

Chapter Summary

“You’re not mad?” He asked carefully

“No of course I’m not mad.” She let out a long breath and wrapped him up in a hug. “I’m just glad you’re okay. I might be a little mad later but not right now.”

“Oh.”

She paused, and then pulled Ranboo for a hug as well. “Thank you for bringing him home safe.”

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Tommy hovered outside the door, hesitant to go inside. Ranboo nudged him forward. “Go on.” He pushed the door to the kitchen open slowly. Kristin was sat at the table, clutching her phone, looking like she hadn’t slept at all.

“Tommy!” She stood, almost throwing the chair on its side, hurrying over. “Oh my god.”

“Uh. Hi?”

“You’re alright.” The relief was evident in her voice. “Thank goodness.”

“You’re not mad?” He asked carefully

“No of course I’m not mad.” She let out a long breath and wrapped him up in a hug. “I’m just glad you’re okay. I might be a little mad later but not right now.”

“Oh.”

She paused, and then pulled Ranboo for a hug as well. “Thank you for bringing him home safe.”

“Uh... You’re welcome.” The other boy stammered, a little taken off guard. She held on a little tighter for a moment, and then let them go.

“I was so worried. There were photos on the news.” She said quietly. “That’s how I found out, you and Void on the rooftop, someone said you got shot, I didn’t have any other news.” She kept looking him over, checking he was alright, noting the slight paleness in his face, and slightly bruised eyes, but nothing more.

“Can I get you anything? Juice, water?” She said finally, as lightly as she could manage.

“He can get it.” Tommy interrupted. “He’s been here enough times, stop fussing.”

She sighed. “You can’t stop me that easily.”

“I’m fine mum, I promise.” He gave her another quick hug. “Supreme healed me, haven’t got a scratch.” He deliberately neglected to mention the bandages he still had.

“If you want me to leave you to it, I will.” She promised. “I’m sure I’m just embarrassing you, but I needed to see you.”

“I’m alright, really.” He promised.

She gave in, a little reluctant, but she believed him. “I’ll leave you to it then.” He gave her a thumbs-up, shoving a glass over to Ranboo, sitting down at the table. The other boy waited for the door to shut, listening for the footsteps up the stairs before pulling a small glass jar out of his pocket, two small pieces of metal inside.

“Before I forget, Supreme said you might want this.”

Tommy’s eyes lit up. “Yo, for the collection?”

“You...have a collection of bullets?” He paled a little. “What?”

“Don’t look that worried, it’s only the second time I’ve been shot. Last time was a bank robbery and it wasn’t even that badly.”

“You were shot. And you keep the bullets.” He said slowly, sounding the words over in his mouth as if that would make them make sense.

“Yup! It’s an agency tradition.” Ranboo didn’t even bother to continue that line of questioning, looking pained.

“Tubbo’s texting me.” He held up his phone, taking a sip from his glass

“Does he want to join movie night?”

Ranboo sent off a text, and then raised his eyebrows. “Well. He....says he’s outside.”

“Outside where?”

“The...house?”

“How did he find my house?”

Ranboo made a vague shrugging gesture. “I don’t know. It’s Tubbo.”

Tommy stood up on his tiptoes, trying to see out of the window, not believing him. Sure enough, there was a short figure in a green hoodie stood on the road, hood up, bag on his shoulder. “You’ve got to be kidding me.”

He stormed out of the kitchen, flinging the door open. “What the hell!”

Tubbo looked a little guilty, but not much. “Hi.”

“How did you find me?”

“You don’t turn your location off boss man, major security issue.” He said casually. “I was just going to say hi.”

“Fucking stalker.” Tommy shot back, without any particular venom. “I can’t believe this.”

He inclined his head, not disagreeing. “Can I come in or are we just going to stand on the doorway attracting attention until the neighbours realise who I am?”

Tommy stepped aside very quickly, closing the door behind him.

“Hi Tubbo.” Ranboo raised a hand.

“Ranboo! My favourite.” He said, in such a deadpan tone it really was hard to tell if he was joking.

“Your favourite?” Tommy asked. “When the hell did that happen.”

“Oh you know, he calls me a lot, we talk about stuff.” He stopped suddenly. “Is that a polar bear?” His eyes widened, and he looked a little sad for a moment, before flying across the room, picking it up, wrapping his arms around it before he could even get his answer. “I love him.”

“You don’t look so good.” Tommy commented

“No shit bossman.” He mumbled into the toy. “The last few weeks have been awful. This bear gives good hugs though.”

“You’re telling me. We almost died earlier.” Ranboo chimed in.

“You what!” The polar bear was almost dropped to the ground, forgotten.

“Oh I thought you knew.”

“No I just came to annoy Tommy cos you weren’t here yesterday.” He said, eyes wide. “What happened?”

“Got shot. Some guy named Jester.” Tommy said casually. “A real prick, some gangs and gun trade shit, I don’t really know.”

Something flickered over Tubbo’s face. “Huh.”

“It’s fine, we’re fine.” He added quickly. “Got in a sticky situation on a mission, we’re alive.”

“Thanks, I noticed.”

The coffee table was shoved out of the way, blankets and pillows migrating onto the floor as they began to settle down, Tubbo just blending in seamlessly with them, chatting back and forth about meaningless things.

“I’m kinda hungry.” Tommy admitted after a little bit. “I haven’t had breakfast.”

“Well then eat something, duh.”

He flipped Tubbo off just as the door opened, Kristin walking through with a pile of folded laundry.
“Fuck you.”

“Tommy, be nice.” She chided

“Yeah Tommy, be nice.” Tubbo teased him. Kristin gave him an odd look, before recognition dawned.
“Hello Toby.” She said, confused.

“Tubbo.” He corrected. “Toby’s a shit name.”

Kristin accepted that very easily. “What are you doing?”

“We’re making pizza.” Tommy declared. “And icecream.”

“That’s not a proper meal.”

“It is now!” He pushed past her, diving into the freezer, shoving frozen vegetables and ready meals aside, digging out some pizza bases. She caught on, taking some ham and cheese and anything else she could find out of the fridge, setting it out for them to use

“When do you have to go by?” Ranboo asked Tubbo, “Don’t you normally have to rush off?”

He glanced at his watch, and then shrugged. “They won’t notice I’m gone until at least tomorrow; they don’t check up on me that often.”

Tommy looked up. “Hey mum, can he stay over?”

Her eyes creased into a smile. “Of course they can.” She dusted her hands off, looking around at the spread of things she’d set out. “Do you need anything else?”

“Do you have any pineapple?” Ranboo asked cautiously.

“Of course.” She pulled open the pantry, handing him a can of tinned pineapple chunks. “Is that alright?”

“That’s perfect, thank you.” He turned back to the table, minding his own business.

“I’ll be upstairs if you need anything, just give me a shout.” She let herself out, closing the door carefully behind her. Tubbo hadn’t moved since Ranboo first spoke, eyes fixed on him.

“Are you good?” He asked cautiously.

“You...like pineapple on pizza.” Tubbo said slowly.

He nodded warily, avoiding his gaze. “Is that a problem?”

“People are entitled to opinions.” He replied, still motionless. “It’s just that some opinions are wrong.”

Ranboo turned, made direct eye contact, picked up the pineapple and carefully sprinkled another handful over his pizza. A green blur shot across the room, and the taller boy folded, his knees taken out from under him, collapsing back onto the floor of pillows with a strangled cry.

“Everything alright down there!”

Tubbo clamped his hand over Ranboo’s mouth, pinning him down on the floor, trying to wrestle him into a headlock. “It’s great Ms Walters!”

“For the last time, it’s Kristin!”

“Got it Ms Walters!” He called back cheerfully. Ranboo struggled helplessly, his arms flailing around.

“Tommy help me!”

“Nope.” He hopped up on the counter, setting the oven timer and settling down to watch. “I’m very happy here, out of the danger zone.”

Ranboo teleported to the left, escaping Tubbo’s grip, standing up and grabbing his pizza, shoving it in the oven before he was tackled again. They rolled around on the floor for a bit, Tubbo wielding a pillow, Ranboo trying to protect himself, laughing a bit too hard to put up much of a defence.

Tommy watched on, shaking his head when Ranboo waved him over, one hand over his stomach protectively, pulling his shirt down to make sure the bandages were hidden.

The goat hybrid sat up triumphantly at last, his beanie half hanging off, but he didn’t seem to care for once. The timer on the pizzas went off and he ran over, flinging the door open.

“Don’t touch that!”

Tubbo snatched his hand back, shaking his hand out. “It’s hot.”

Tommy snorted. “Genius observation right there.” He snatched a piece of Ranboo’s pizza, taking a bite out of it. “Mmm pineapple.”

“I will fucking murder you.” Tubbo snatched up a knife, an odd glint in his eye. “Don’t put that thing anywhere near me.”

“Oooo pineapple.” He waved it near the hybrid’s face. “Spookyyyyy.”

Tubbo lunged forward, forcing him to dodge back out of his way.

“He tried to bite me!” Tommy held his hand up, horrified. “Did you see that?”

“You were antagonising him.” Ranboo pointed out. “You saw what happened to me, you really had it coming.”

He circled round to the other side of the kitchen island, avoiding him carefully. “Stay back.”

The other boy settled down, looking pleased with himself, starting to inhale his food, and Tommy followed suit, the kitchen falling into silence, apart from the occasional bickering or hum of appreciation.

Kristin appeared again, hanging by the door, trying to catch his eye. He gave in, getting to his feet, trotting over. "What is it?"

"I've got an important meeting here tonight." She told him quietly. "I'm sorry it's very short notice, but your friends might not be able to stay over. I'm sorry, I know I said but it just came through."

"Here?" He asked, confused. "Why here."

"Yeah, it's odd." She agreed. "I'm not sure why, but the station has no space, and we need somewhere confidential."

"Oh. Alright." His shoulders fell a little, resigned.

"And when they arrive, just stay out of their way, alright." She said quietly. "I'm not saying hide, but don't draw attention to yourself, you know the drill."

"What's the matter?" Ranboo piped up, worried.

"You can't stay over." He said tiredly. "Mum's got a meeting."

Tubbo was turned away so he couldn't see him but the other boy's face fell a little. "Oh."

"I'm sorry." She repeated to the other two, "It's very out of the blue."

Ranboo chewed his lip for a moment. "Would you mind if he came to mine?" He asked Kristin carefully. "He can stay over."

"You have a house?" Tommy asked, surprised.

"Where did you think I lived?" He flushed. "And it's just an apartment, the Agency gave it to me."

"The Agency gave you an apartment!"

He opened his mouth as if to speak but then shook his head. "You'll see."

"Yeah I don't see why that would be a problem." Kristin agreed, filling the moment of awkward silence. "So long as you let me know where you are and when you're getting back."

Tommy lit up again, and then quickly covered it up with half a feigned scowl. "Fine."

"You might want to pack some things, I don't have much." Ranboo said, a little awkward.

She held the door open for him, heading back to her office, and he trailed after her, dropping his voice a little. "Who's coming to the meeting, why are you so worried?"

"No one like that." She reassured him. "I just worry. You being a meta and the people in power, they don't mix, we've kept your powers a secret this long, I don't want to make even a single mistake." She ruffled his hair. "Don't worry, you'll be out of here anyway. Go pack a bag, they're waiting for you."

He ran up the stairs two at a time, dragging a suitcase out, tossing in the bag of clothes Wilbur bought him, he hadn't even had time to open them yet. He threw his duffel bag with his uniform on top, he never went anywhere without it, as well as a few other bits and pieces thrown in, Shroud perched on the top, dragging it back down the stairs, clattering all the way down.

"I'm back." He declared, throwing his things down on the carpet. The other two had packed up most of their stuff, what little they'd bought.

"I can see that. How are we getting there?" Tubbo asked. "I can't really take public transport or anything."

"You have a miserable existence," Tommy told him, receiving a cheerful nod in response.

"I really do!"

"I can teleport us." Ranboo offered, pulling his bag onto his shoulder. "If we're going now?"

"I mean we might as well."

"You're not teleporting us." Tommy cut in. "Absolutely not."

"Why not?"

"You overdid it yes..."

"I've had time to recover." He interrupted, "and it's only one way, and we're off work for now. Besides, I do it all the time."

"Not carrying two people."

"I want to teleport," Tubbo said, excited. "Please." That earned him a glare

"You're not helping." Ranboo evidently had enough, reaching out and placing his hand on Tommy's shoulder, a familiar tug wrenching at his stomach. They reappeared in a dim, empty room, and Tommy immediately felt sick, staggering away. Tubbo didn't seem to be affected at all, eyes wide, grinning. "That was so cool!"

"I'm going to throw up."

"Please don't. I'd never get it out of the carpet." Ranboo said. "Anyway, home sweet home."

The apartment was tiny and devoid of most furniture. There was little more than a cramped kitchen, the fridge nearly empty, barely large enough to fit two people side by side, a bathroom and a small living room, an old, likely second hand by the scratches, TV sat on a worn coffee table, the couch having seen better days.

Ranboo's bedroom wasn't much larger than a closet, a camp bed in the corner rather than an actual mattress, his clothes stacked neatly on a shelf in the corner, little more.

"It's a bit empty," Tubbo noted, without any particular emotion attached to the statement.

“Well, I can’t exactly afford furniture.” He didn’t seem too bothered about it, throwing his bag down by a camp bed in the corner. “I needed somewhere to live and I didn’t want to live in the tower, so, mouldy apartment.”

Tubbo set his laptop down in the living room, humming to himself quietly. “So what are we going to do?”

“Now? I don’t know, but we could go out later?” Ranboo suggested. “The arcade is nice in the evening.”

“I mean, I’m good with staying in,” Tubbo said, a little awkwardly.

“Oh?”

He fixed him with a look. “Sure, take the president's kid out in public nothing will go wrong with that ever.”

“Oh.” Realisation dawned slowly. “Sorry.”

“The media would have a field day.” Tubbo said wryly. “The presidents kid, in public, with the Commissioners, who my father hates, and some guy, no offence.”

“None taken.” Ranboo said, amused. “I know what you mean.”

“I don’t think they’d even have time for that. They’re just hoovering up any bad news about the Agency at the moment.” He said cynically

“When are they not.” Tubbo pointed out. “But yeah, since Niki it’s got worse, they’ve been trying to find out everything about what happened.”

“I mean I haven’t heard anything new,” Tommy said after a few moments. “I don’t really want to ask either.”

“They’d tell us if they found anything,” Ranboo reassured him. “Puffy definitely would.”

“I know most of it.” Tubbo turned the screen so they could see. “Been stalking their communications.”

Tommy blinked. “You what?”

“I’ve been reading their emails.” His tone suggested this was obvious, even though it very clearly wasn’t. “I was bored.”

“How?” He sat up, taken aback. “You didn’t tell me you were a hacker.”

“I’m not, well, kind of, but not for this. You don’t have to hack in if you just know all the executive passwords.”

“And?”

He shrugged. "They're stumped. No one knows what happened so they're just moving forward. Trying to find next of kin so they can make a decision on things."

"She doesn't have a family though, does she?"

"She never mentioned them." Ranboo sat down awkwardly, leaning in to read. "I just want to go back to the dance studio," he said wistfully. "I have so many good memories in that place."

"I mean you can," Tubbo said, matter-of-fact. "Just includes some breaking and entering."

"It's not the same."

"I thought maybe if I could just find out more, maybe I could find something to help us stop them." Tommy said quietly. "I've been looking everywhere."

Tubbo gave him a sympathetic look. "I'm sorry, but you won't find anything that a department of specialists didn't."

"I mean I tried, and we had that breakthrough about Thanatos but nothing else..." He trailed off, glancing at Tubbo.

"Oh, I've known about Thanatos for months." Tubbo remarked, "You don't have to hide it."

"You...what?" Tommy said slowly, staring at him.

"Yeah, they keep a lot of information from the Agency." He continued, just as casually. "The Enforcers have been trying to track him down for months. No luck."

Tommy felt a little hollow. "They knew about him?"

"Of course they did. The Syndicate is the biggest threat to the nation right now, and like I said, they have whole teams of people to find things out."

"Oh." A hollow feeling settled in his stomach. The victory of his discovery had been torn away from him with no warning, and he was back to square one all over again. His crisis went completely unnoticed by the other two, Ranboo leaning over to get a better look.

"What about Lethe?" He asked curiously. "Do they know anything about Lethe?"

"Lethe's been around for agessss." Tubbo glanced at his laptop. "But people don't know about him because he doesn't join the attacks."

"He?"

"Him." Tubbo confirmed. "Judging from voice clips they found of the Syndicate talking about him. They were trying to work on voices to see if they could make a breakthrough there but Achilles uses a voice changer of some kind, and Orpheus has enough command over his voice that he doesn't have to, and Lethe doesn't speak at all, they don't have any leads there."

"Why are you telling us all this?" Tommy asked finally. "Won't you get in trouble?"

"He seems interested." He gestured towards Ranboo

“Wait until Puffy hears about this.”

“No more work talk.” Tommy said firmly. He settled down, pulling his blanket up. “Film. What are we watching?”

Tubbo shrugged. “What do you want to watch?”

“He really likes Up.” Ranboo

“Hey!”

“Up is a good movie.” Tubbo agreed. “We’ll watch up.” Tommy calmed down instantly.

“You have good taste.”

They settled down pretty quickly, falling silent as the movie began to play, only broken from time to time by Tommy’s running commentary. It was an easy familiarity he and Ranboo had fallen into many times, even before they’d really gotten to know each other at all.

Even with Tubbo now there, or especially with Tubbo there, it came just as easily. The sky darkened outside but they didn’t really notice, bickering over the next show to watch.

His communicator began to buzz against his wrist. Tommy sat up, pushing his sleeve up, waving for Tubbo to be quiet, stopping them mid-argument. He put a finger on his lips, accepting the call.

“Hello?”

“I need backup!” Foxtrot’s voice crackled over both of their communicators suddenly, sounding desperate. “Please, anyone!”

Tommy’s eyes widened in alarm. “What’s happening?” He was echoed by other boy, both immediately on high alert

“I need help! They’ve placed a bomb outside the hospital!”

Chapter End Notes

RIP movie night, again.

Sorry for the break in uploads, burned myself out a bit with daily updates for so long, not helped by the end of the arc coming up and some major plot points I want to spend some time on getting right but I'm trying to get back on track.

Also I saw some people say they'd written works inspired by this one, or someone mentioned making art, please, if you do end up making anything inspired by this fic let me know, link me on Twitter or pop it in the discord or something, I don't know if anyone will but if you do that would be so cool and I'd love to see it!

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A city at war

Chapter Summary

“Hello Theseus.”

Tommy felt a cold chill down his spine, turning slowly. The way out of the alleyway was blocked by a familiar boar mask, sword held to a struggling Void’s throat, the other hand over his mouth. Ranboo was shaking his head desperately, eyes wide, Orpheus perched up on the railings of a fire escape next to them. He tilted his head back, a smile playing over his teeth. “I wasn’t expecting you.”

Chapter Notes

Buckle up, this one's a long one

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Ranboo was staring at his communicator. “That makes no sense.”

“Terrorism is literally their thing, what about that doesn’t make sense.” Tommy snapped. “We gotta go.”

Practiced routine kicked in almost immediately, once the initial shock had faded. They changed in silence, Tommy refilling their water bottles, tossing Ranboo’s over to him, ready in a matter of minutes. The other meta fitted his mask in place, glancing over at Tubbo. “Can you get back home safe?”

“Probably.”

“You can stay here.” He said quickly. “Just until it’s safe, if you need.”

“I think I’ll risk it.” He unplugged his laptop cable, packing it away, tossing his backpack on his shoulder. He paused, looking at them both. “Good luck, I guess.”

“And you.” He tossed Tubbo the spare key so he could lock the door on his way out. “Ready to go?”

Tommy snatched up a few snack bars and packets of sweets from the ground, stuffing them into a pocket on his trouser leg. “Sure.” He received an odd look. “Trust me, always take sugar.” He snapped his communicator on. “Theseus to Command, where are we going?”

“St Mary’s hospital.” The Captain answered. “Rendezvous point is on St Mary’s Plaza just outside.”

“Understood.” He shut the link off.

“St Mary’s.” Ranboo’s brow furrowed. “That’s the meta hospital isn’t it.”

Tommy snorted. “If you mean the one that doesn’t turn metas away, then yes.”

“Better than nothing.” He double checked the map on his wrist. “I can get us most of the way there? If it’s going to be a rescue mission I don’t want to wear myself out.”

“Sounds good.” They reappeared on a street front, a few corners from where they needed to go, hitting the ground running.

It was late, the streets were near-deserted, making the final stage easy, running down the street into the open plaza. The hospital dominated most of the square, an old building leftover from the university that used to stand there, before most of the campus was moved to a new location outside of the city centre.

Warning tape had already been set up, streams of people flooding out the side entrances, the patients that could walk milling around aimlessly as doctors and nurses supervised the removal of bed after bed of the sick, trailing wires and IV’s.

Blaze and Spark had beat them there, looking out of breath, though they weren’t far behind. Foxtrot’s shoulders dipped in relief as he saw them, the fox hybrid pacing back and forth. “Hi.”

“What happened?” Blaze demanded.

“Got a call to a suspicious package. It was left on the desk with this.” He held up a plain white mask, with no features on it. “We’ve cleared the premises but there’s no note, no timer, we don’t know when it could trigger.”

“What do we do?”

“Wait for the Captain to arrive, for now. They have an evacuation procedure in place.” He pulled a face. “Funnily enough, as a hospital that is known for treating metas they’ve had their fair share of threats so they don’t need us immediately but that thing looks nasty, if it goes goes off...” He didn’t finish

“That’s fine, that’s fine, that’s normal and fine and I’m okay with everything that’s happening.” Tommy began to pace as well, back and forth. “I know how to deal with this.”

“You’re scared.” Ranboo said bluntly. “Don’t worry, so am I.”

“I’m not scared. I’m a big fucking man why would I be scared?”

“You just keep talking. It kind of gives it away.” Void pointed out, not unkindly.

“I’m not scared, why would I be scared, there’s nothing to be scared of.” He repeated without seeming to notice.

“Orpheus sighted at City Hall!” The Captain called over their radios. “They’re active, be ready for anything.”

Tommy put his head in his hands slowly. “You know what. You’re right, I’m just going to shut my mouth from now on.” The other boy was too distracted to even comment on that, checking and double checking his gear.

“Buckle up.” Blaze said grimly. “The others must be on their way. Stay away from them, and from the device, you hear me?”

“Come on, we can help.” Ranboo protested. “I can just teleport it out somewhere safe

“You know the rules, apprentices can’t get directly involved.”

“We’re not technically apprentices anymore.” Tommy pointed out

“Still underage, don’t fight me on this, I’m not putting you near an active explosive. Who do you think I am?”

“We can’t touch it, the Enforcers will deal with it, if we try anything and it goes wrong we’ll be liable for every bit of damage, and every person that dies.” There was a kind of cold disconnect in her voice, deliberately distancing herself from feeling the true horror of what she just said.

They were helpless, trapped between trying to do what was right on the field and what was necessary for the survival of the Agency. “It’s not right, and it’s not fair, but it’s what we’ve got to work with.” She said tiredly.

“Then what do we do?”

“Establish a perimeter.” The Warden ordered. “No one comes in, not without authorisation, keep the public away from the bomb at all costs.” He looked around. “Where the hell is Purpled, he’s supposed to be here.”

Spark looked around before shrugging. “Not a clue. He didn’t reply to the message.”

“Fine. We’ll work without him. Theseus, 23rd street, Void, 32nd.”

Officers were already moving in, reinforcing the tape that had been set up with proper barricades. Tommy ran off in the direction he’d been pointed, relieved to have something to do. The night streets had been quiet, but the commotion and sirens were starting to draw attention.

Windows were opened, curtains pushed aside, lights turning on in windows far above his head. The late-night commuters were hovering at the edge of the plaza outside the hospital, trying to get a glimpse of what was going on.

“Please go back to your homes!” His voice felt pitifully weak

“Everyone, get back inside your homes!”

“Fuck off, I’m not listening to some prick in a coloured jumper.” A mocking voice called out.

“You heard him. Get inside.” An unfamiliar voice snapped from behind him. An Enforcer stepped out from behind him, gun in hand wearing a captain’s badge, and the man who mocked him backed away rapidly. The captain gave him a nod. “Keep watch for us. We’ll do the shouting.”

He relaxed a little, the backup of a squadron of armed military police does a lot for self-confidence he found. They began to move up the street, bit by bit, clearing out any last remnants of people in shops or bars, herding them back to their homes.

Time crawled past, the moon climbing higher into the sky as he watched the shadows, barricades being dragged into place across the foot of the street. An odd quiet had fallen, the calm before the storm. The initial panic had faded and now it was a waiting game, holding out for the other shoe to drop.

“Anything?”

“Device is stable so far. Just like the other fifty times people have asked.” Foxtrot reported. “Android is trying to scan it but they’re not letting us close.”

“Heads up, Lethe was sighted a few minutes near City Hall, where Orpheus was a few minutes ago. Everyone be on your guard.”

“Should I tell the Enforcers?” Tommy asked. “There’s a squad with me.”

“They probably already know.” He relayed the information anyway.

“We’re far enough away that we don’t have to worry about that.” The captain said shortly by way of reply. “Anything else?”

“All clear, no sign of an explosion yet.”

“Alright, nice work kid.” Tommy wrinkled his nose at the patronising tone, but for once in his life he knew better than to talk back.

“I gotta go.” He turned, running back down the street, pressing his hand to his earpiece. “Void?”

“Yes?” The answer came after a slight pause.

“I’m all done, where are you?”

“I’m by the shopping district.” His voice was strained. “But I’ll meet you back at the hospital.”

“I thought you were on 32nd? Is everything alright?”

Another pause. “Yeah.”

“You sure?”

“I’m fine, get back to the others, I’ll meet you there.” Some kind of unease settled in his stomach. He wasn’t one to overthink things generally, but that had sounded off. He grabbed his communicator,

flicking the screen over. Tracking device for several of the heroes showed up on a small mini map, Spark still close to the hospital, most likely on stand by for any explosion, no sign of Purpled.

Ranboo's marker wasn't where it was supposed to be, nowhere near the area he'd been assigned to set up the perimeter and not close the shopping district either. He broke into a run, reasoning that if he was wrong there was nothing to worry about, he might get a slap on the wrist for not getting back quickly.

But the self-destructive mantra circling around his head was louder, that this time he might be too late, and he refused to let that happen again. He took a shortcut through an underground tunnel, his path thankfully clear, the last few civilians heading out of the way.

Graffiti coated the old brick walls of the alleyway, some faded, some fresh, some carefully covered up with white paint by an army of city workers, only to have new phrases painted on top hours after they left, the Enforcer ram's skull with a red x through it, crude drawings, a myriad of offensive nicknames for the president.

Any and every grievance they had was left behind on an anonymous street corner, small battles playing out in plain view. Manberg was a city at war, with explosives and bullets, but also with spray paint and stencils, across boarded-over storefronts and cracked old walls, the small acts of defiance they could afford.

He turned the final corner, squinting under the dim light of the street lamps. "Void?" There was no sign of him. He checked his communicator again and sure enough, he was right over the other meta's blinking marker, but no response. "Hello?" He reached for his earpiece, intending to call him again.

"Hello Theseus."

Tommy felt a cold chill down his spine, turning slowly. The way out of the alleyway was blocked by a familiar boar mask, sword held to a struggling Void's throat, the other hand over his mouth. Ranboo was shaking his head desperately, eyes wide, Orpheus perched up on the railings of a fire escape next to them. He tilted his head back, a smile playing over his teeth. "I wasn't expecting you."

Achilles released his hand, and Ranboo gasped in a breath. "Theseus run!"

"I'm not leaving." Tommy said stubbornly, but his voice wavered. He could barely tear his eyes away from Orpheus. The villain's grin widened.

"This seems familiar."

"I...I wouldn't fucking know would I." Tommy managed. His palms were clammy, the mask burning itself into his eyes. He felt sick, his head spinning, there was screaming in the back of his head

"No, you wouldn't." He looked amused

"Void teleport!" Tommy hissed.

"He's a power negator." Ranboo's voice was barely a whisper. "I can't. I told you not to come."

"Well I didn't fucking listen. Let him go!"

“You’ve convinced me.” Orpheus leant against the wall. “Well done.” The sarcasm dripped off his tongue. He jumped down, his trench coat fluttering out behind him, landing nimbly on the floor below, striding towards him. Tommy backed away slowly.

“Ah. I’d be careful if I were you.” Orpheus grabbed Tommy’s chin, dragging it up to look him in the eyes. He froze, Achilles’s blade pressing closer to Void’s neck, Ranboo’s fearful expression holding him in place.

“Let me go.” The words pressed out through gritted teeth.

“In case you’ve forgotten, I’m the only one here that works for.” Tommy’s eyes darted between them, fingers tightening, trying and failing to come up with a plan.

They were running out of time. There was no other way, and he didn’t care much to think one through. The lid of the trash can shot up from behind them, leaving a trail of red light behind it, slamming into the back of Orpheus’s head, leaving him stunned.

Tommy didn’t hesitate, using the distraction to wrap his arm around the villain’s neck, flicking out a switchblade from his belt, slamming him against the wall, breathing hard. “Two can play that game motherfucker.”

He glanced back automatically, but it had worked, somehow. Achilles wasn’t moving, staring at them. “I know you can’t fucking fight bitch.” Tommy continued, ignoring Orpheus’s struggles. He was strong, admittedly, but so was Tommy, and he had so much more to lose. “Either Achilles lets him go, unharmed, or I’m going to start stabbing shit.”

“You’ll be dead before you leave the alleyway.” He hissed. Achilles was looking back and forth between them, waiting to see what happened.

“But I’ll get the chance to beat you the fuck up.” Tommy didn’t even know if he was acting anymore, the anger surging up in his chest, pressing the switchblade closer to his neck.

“Stop! Let him go.” The villain loosened his grip, and Void staggered away, running towards Tommy, but he wasn’t fast enough. Achilles barrelled past, yanking Tommy’s arm away before he could react, shoving the other Syndicate leader behind him, his fist sweeping around. Pain erupted across his chest, the brittle excuse for a chestplate cracking under the force, a fracture running down the plastic.

Tommy went flying, slamming down against the floor, knocking the air out of his chest. He dragged himself back, gasping for air. Orpheus stood, brushing himself off primly, unphased. “That was…”

“Stupid, I know.” Tommy staggered to his feet, backing away towards Void, who moved in front of him protectively.

“I was going to say brave, but stupid, yes. Now how about you stop-“ A hand wrapped around his wrist, and he jolted forward.

They reappeared in an empty alleyway and Ranboo slid down, taking deep breaths. “Oh god.”

“What the hell happened there?” Tommy demanded.

He didn’t reply for a moment, eyes closed, head in his hands. “Ran into them, got caught.” He mumbled through his hands. “Thanks, by the way.”

“No fuck off. Give me a proper explanation.” Tommy snapped. “That doesn’t just happen.”

“I thought I could trail them. Got overconfident, they caught me, I don’t want to talk about it.”

“You could have died!” Tommy exclaimed.

“Yeah and you could have died on me yesterday when you got shot, it’s our job!” The raised voice came totally out of character for the normally mild-mannered boy in front of him, leaving Tommy stunned for a few moments

“That sounds like some kinda bullshit I’d say.” He said finally

“I’m sorry, I’m sorry.” The older boy rubbed his eyes. “I didn’t mean it, that was uncalled for.”

“Nah, I’d be saying some wild shit if I just got kidnapped by the Syndicate.” He crouched down next to him. “

“I tried to get you to stay away. I couldn’t exactly say hey, I’m being held at sword point, please don’t come here could I.”

“So you thought yeah, I’ll sound really suspicious while telling the guy who’s known for not doing what he’s told, to do something.” Tommy drawled. “Logic.”

“I was trying to keep you away. You confuse me.” Ranboo muttered. “I don’t know how your brain works,”

“Me neither.” Came the cheerful reply. He held a hand out, helping Ranboo to his feet. “You look tired.”

“I’m good.” Void leaned against the wall rubbing his eyes, smiling weakly. “Let’s just not tell the Warden about that one.” They shared a sympathetic look. He could already hear the words ringing in his head, the inevitable dressing down they were going to get.

“We have to.” Tommy conceded. “They need to know what’s coming. He pressed his hand to his earpiece. “Captain?”

“Theseus, what is it?”

“Uh, kind of long story but we just had a run-in with Orpheus and Achilles.” Tommy relayed. “Void was there as well, but we got away.”

There was a few moments of silence. “Why is it always you.” The Captain said finally. “Thank you, are you both alright?”

“Bit shaken, but we’re good,” Ranboo assured her. “They were in the 2nd district, they looked like they’re heading for the city centre.”

Her voice went distant, talking to someone in the background, “We need to up the evacuation, we’re running out of time.”

Tommy dug a bag of sweets out of his pocket, holding it out to the other meta, "I didn't think we'd need it this soon but sugar?"

He took a handful gratefully, slipping them under his mask. "I take it back, I see what you mean about bringing sweets along."

"Let's just take it slow, we can walk right?" He was keeping one eye on the other boy, looking for any sign of shock or injury.

A dull thud ran under their feet, followed by the distant sound of a concussive explosion, thundering over their heads. The world seemed to go still for one, two, three beats as they stared around. "Was that..." Ranboo breathed

Tommy went pale. "Oh my god."

"They really did it." One pair of horrified eyes met another.

"Forget walking, we're going, now." Tommy grabbed his arm. "Run!"

They sprinted onto the plaza to a scene out of a nightmare. The front of the hospital was in flames, glass shattered across the floor, the lobby blown wide open. The floor was cracked and split, scorched black. The wall of the second and third floor had collapsed, rubble scattered across the plaza, thrown all around.

The smell of sulphur hung heavy in the air, filled with screaming and distant cries. The crackling fire and shouted orders broke into his stunned haze, figures running back and forth like ants, barely visible through the smoke. Somewhere in the distance, the distinct outline of the Warden appeared, holding an oxygen mask over a young boy's mouth, carrying him in his arms. He handed him over the paramedics, plunging back inside with a determined expression

He searched around frantically for someone to help, Android, the Captain, the Warden, anyone. A shape appeared out of the haze in a black hoodie, waving at them. "Hey!"

"Spark, what do we do?" Tommy ran to meet him. "Where are the others?"

"Don't go in." Spark grabbed his arm. "Stay out here, we're not allowed."

"We have to just watch?"

"Stay there!" The Captain staggered out of the flames, streaked with soot. She pushed her mask up, taking deep lungfuls of air. Her eyes were stained red, and it was hard to tell if it was from the smoke. She handed a limp figure in her arms over the paramedics.

"I want to help." Tommy protested. "Just tell me what to do."

Blaze followed her out, putting a hand on Spark's arm. "You're not going in, you'll do what you're told, and you'll stay out here."

"I'm afraid we need everyone we can get." The Warden cut in. "They may have to go inside."

“The children aren’t going in there, end of story.” Blaze snapped, earning himself a warning look.

“It’s one thing to question my orders in private. On the field is quite another.” He said coldly. “Do your job hero, don’t tell me how to do mine.”

“They’re kids! We have rules we need to abide by and you have no right to break them.”

“And what about the children in there.”

“Your arguing is going to hurt more people than you could ever save.” The Captain finally snapped. “This is not the time. Theseus, Void, Spark, go to the medics, do whatever they tell you to, understood?”

The paramedics accepted the extra hands without question, guiding them around. He busied himself running back and forth, carrying stretchers, first aid kits, anything and everything, trying to keep his mind off of the grim reality in front of him.

If he kept his eyes turned aside, he could pretend it wasn’t there, if he plugged his ears, he could act like he didn’t hear it, even though the images were burned onto his retina, screaming too loud to ignore, the wail of sirens ringing in his head.

He passed a roll of bandages, glancing over at a woman rushing past, white band around her arm, red shawl around her shoulders, short blonde hair peeking out from under a hood.

“Can I help you?” She seemed to slow, taking a moment to breathe.

“I’m alright, but thank you.” He might have enquired further but there wasn’t time.

“This is so much worse than we thought.” Rose stood nearby, catching a moment's break, hands on her hips, her wing still wrapped in bandages, but suited up, helping the healers as best she could.

“It gets worse still.” Android sounded weary over the radio. “The hospital was a distraction.”

A cold chill ran down Tommy’s spine. The same expression was reflected on the faces of the heroes around him, that feeling of a worst fear being realised. “What does that mean?” Blaze asked finally.

“Three police stations are on fire, including their central headquarters, I just got the call.”

“Fuck.” Sarnap slammed a hand against the wall in frustration

“They slipped past us.” The Warden picked up a piece of rubble, holding it in his gauntlet, clenching his fist. It crumbled, dust sifting through his fingers and he threw it down, eyes burning with a kind of awful rage as he looked at all of them. “No one rests until this is over, until every flame is out, until everyone is safe. We can’t afford to fail, understood?”

“Yes sir.” The affirmation was echoed across those there, and across the comm links. “Those who aren’t directly involved in the evacuation, spread out. I want all eyes in the sky, keep me updated on anything out of the ordinary.”

Tommy didn't need to be asked twice, sprinting away from the wreckage, away from the injured. He felt like a coward, but he ran anyway, no longer caring. He turned the first corner, far away enough from the barricade, and doubled over, heaving emptily onto the ground, the bitter taste of vomit coating his tongue. A hand settled on his arm, Ranboo holding out a bottle of water, rubbing reassuring circles across his shoulder.

"You too?" Tommy said finally, once he'd regained the ability to speak.

"I've seen some things. I've never seen anything like that."

"We're not done yet." He said grimly. He pulled himself up, dusting off the worst of the soot, running a hand across the hairline crack the earlier encounter with Achilles had left behind on his chestplate. There was a dull ache across his front, the constant running reopening the remains of the bullet wound, but he didn't let himself think about it, striding up the street, until he didn't know who he was putting the brave face on for anymore.

"The headquarters of the Manberg Mail on 13th got hit." 404 reported back. "Police are arriving at the scene, looks like no one was in the building but they don't have an entrance anymore."

"There's was another explosive in the lobby of the OfflineTV Tower, but it looks like it failed to detonate."

Reports were coming in, either all clear, and now and then, another fire, another explosion, few and far between but too many, far too many. He scanned every shop front, every alleyway, every tunnel. Every shadow was suddenly a threat. The wail of sirens became constant background noise, waxing and waning as they crossed between the districts, and each time they rose he got jumpy, looking around for the sound.

"This is awful," Ranboo said quietly, staring out at the distant glow of the hospital. "I can't believe they'd do this."

"Well, you best believe it." Tommy snapped, a little too harsh but the other boy didn't seem to notice.

"Police stations, a subway, a newspaper office, a news station. They're hitting everywhere that'll cripple the city as much as possible."

They fell into silence, unable to think of anything to say to that. Tommy leaped across another rooftop, eyes glued to the streets. "Theseus, Void, anything?"

"Nothing new to report," He responded, wiping a hand over his eyes wearily. "I think we're clear."

"I haven't heard anything else, so head back. And avoid District 3." She warned them. "The police station fire there has got out of hand and it's spreading too fast to control."

Tommy's head shot up. "What?"

"It's jumped to homes and it's moving fast." She explained. "The fire department is on it but they can only be in so many places at once. It hasn't rained in weeks, everything's bone dry." She said grimly. "This is going to be a long day."

He shut off his earpiece. "Can...?" Ranboo didn't wait for him to finish, already knowing what he was going to ask. They reappeared at the top of Tommy's street, looking down the road. The police

station at the foot was nearly consumed, brightly outlined the dark night.

The fire department had all but given up on it, leaving a skeleton crew to keep it in check while they battled the flames in the buildings around it.

It was quickly obvious what the cause of the spread was. A gas station right next to it lay in complete ruins, blackened and twisted, pieces of stone and scraps of metal thrown all around the street, thankfully far away from any homes to cause physical damage but not far away enough for the fire from what must have been the gas tanks exploding to have jumped ship to the residential area.

It was still down the street from his house, but they were moving fast, fed by a strong wind, racing up the terraces. Tommy watched them with a kind of distant horror.

"I grew up in that house." He whispered. "That's my first real home, we have to do something."

"There's nothing we can do. The fire is out of control, everyone is out of the houses, they need us in midtown."

"We can stay, we can help." He pleaded. "There has to be something we can do."

"This is up to the fire department. We can't stay." Ranboo told him. "I'm so sorry." He knew, deep down he knew the other boy was right. He let himself be turned away, a hollow feeling in his chest. He barely even noticed the teleport, the sudden return to the noise and chaos of the plaza barely phasing him.

"Commissioner!" Void dropped them down next to the police barricade, running over to a familiar figure in a plain blue jacket, clearly having gotten here as fast as possible, without the time to get into uniform. "What's the situation?"

Kristin looked up and then shook her head sadly. "You shouldn't be here. You're just kids."

"We're working," Tommy answered before she could say anything more. She dropped her voice.

"I know but I still don't feel comfortable sending my son in, I don't even like sending my own officers into this."

"Not your son right now." He said as kindly as possible. "Just Theseus. Where are you short of people, we can back them up."

She glanced down at her radio. "I'll let you know as it comes in."

Tommy dropped his voice. "The fire's heading up the street."

Kristin's expression tightened in understanding. "I know. They told me, just don't think about it, alright, everything will be fine." She said it with such conviction that he let himself believe her.

"How's the evacuation going?"

"The Enforcers are dealing with it now, it's out of our hands, both yours and mine." She relayed. "Not that the Captain's happy about it."

“Send another unit to the back of the hospital, they might try and get in again.” She ordered, walking off. Punz appeared in her wake, looking irritable, and tired. “Have either of you heard anything from Purpled?”

“Has he not arrived yet?” Tommy asked, amazed.

“He said he was on his way, something about being in the middle of something and missing the alert.”

“Fucks sake,” Tommy muttered

Punz glared at him. “I’ll talk to him. It’s not your job to get mad at him.”

“Mistakes happen.” Ranboo tried to sound more optimistic.

“Not in this line of work they don’t.” Punz turned away, storming over the plaza, and they watched him go

“Purpled’s in troubleeee,” Tommy said in a sing song tone. “He’s going to get murderreeeeed.”

“He’s so dead.” Spark agreed, joining them. “And I’m going to watch and laugh.”

“That’s not a cause for celebration.”

They jumped in unison, Tommy spinning around looking guilty. “Hi Captain.”

She joined them, hands clasped behind her back, looking up at the hospital. “I don’t see you two doing much either.”

“I mean I don’t know what do to, and if I do anything without being told how I’ll break it.”

“The last of our people are getting out now, Enforcer crews are taking the rest.” She sounded both tense and visibly relieved.

“I never thought I’d be grateful for Enforcers.” Ranboo said wryly, earning a few quiet snorts of laughter, or hums of agreement from the others. Everyone looked tired and worn, eyes red rimmed from the smoke.

“Code white, code white, the Syndicate are here!”

“And I thought it was nearly over.” Blaze said wearily. “I was wondering when those fuckers would show their faces.”

“You must have jinxed it.” Spark said as cheerfully as he could manage, but it fell flat.

“Not the time. Get back.” The older heroes moved in front of them protectively, as Achilles marched out onto the plaza, illuminated under the bright floodlights. The barricade lay in ruins behind him, he’d clearly barrelled straight through. Spark’s eyes were wide, staring at him.

“Oh. You haven’t seem them face to face before.” Void realised.

“Not really no.” Spark squeaked. “You have?”

“Yeah, got kidnapped by them about half an hour ago.” He said casually. “But then Theseus body slammed Orpheus and held him at knifepoint back so it worked out really.”

Spark scowled at him. “Fuck off. You think you’re funny or something?”

“Uh. No, actually.” Tommy wrung his hands nervously. “That’s actually true.”

“You alright?”

He managed a weak smile. “This is what, third time lucky? Wait fourth. This is the fourth time now.”

Android snatched up his radio. “Warden we need you!” He didn’t hesitate, plunging in before the villain could have time to gain his bearings, the other two following him, as little use as it was.

They were doing their best, but this time was different, this time wasn’t a half assed trap at a corner store, the villain showed no signs of backing down, he gave no ground, advancing on them, easily dominating even in a three vs one, Blaze’s fire all but useless against him, the Captain serving as little more than a distraction, weaving back and forth, just out of his reach.

The only one who stood a chance was Android, and even he was already on a back foot, skidding across the rubble.

Tommy turned away unable to watch, one hand pressed to his chest, trying to steady his breathing, Void watching over him, keeping an eye on the fight. “We should get to cover.”

He backed away towards a slab of fallen concrete, propped up on a cracked bench, forming a makeshift shelter.

“Blaze is down! I repeat Blaze is down.” The panicked call came over the radio and Tommy turned to Spark letting out a strangled cry as Achilles loomed over a fallen Sapnap, raising his sword.

“Leave him alone!” Spark hurled a fireball at the villain, helpless to do anything as it evaporated across his chest. Achilles raised his head slowly.

“More child soldiers Captain?” He addressed the ram hybrid. “Don’t you have enough?”

Spark shivered. “He’s somehow worse when he talks.”

The sword raised higher and Eryn tried to make a break for it, running across the rubble towards the fight. Tommy wrapped his hand around the other boy’s wrist, not letting him go, Void seizing his other shoulder. “I’m sorry about this.” He said immediately.

“That’s my brother!” Spark was kicking and scratching blindly, trying to get away. “I gotta get to him, that’s my brother!”

“You can’t save him.”

“I don’t care!” He lunged for Tommy, teeth bared in a last-ditch attempt to free himself.

A trident shot past with no warning, flying across the square, and Achilles stumbled back, barely avoiding being run right through. A green shield appeared over Blaze, and the Warden crossed the final few metres, stepping in front of Blaze protectively. He slammed his trident down, a shield flickering into place over his other wrist, stepping back into a defensive position.

“How about a fair fight.”

The Syndicate leader didn't grace him with a reply, lunging for him instead, steel clashing on steel, the Warden throwing his trident up, the sword skidding off of it. They were evenly matched in strength and skill, battling back and forth across the plaza, sparks flying from their weapons, two titans colliding in a show almost impressive if it wasn't so deadly.

The shields shattered under Achilles's fists, and the Warden would summon another, neither able to gain the upper hand for long enough to mean anything, twisting and turning, trying to rip the other's weapon from their hand, blow for blow.

No words were spoken, little more than shouts or the odd grunt of effort but still nothing budged. The Warden couldn't get close enough to break through Achilles's defences and Achilles had no way of getting any closer to the Warden, the trident forming a spinning barbed shield.

Achilles brought his sword around and reversed the attack, now cutting downwards from his right, but his opponent was faster, dancing out of his reach, the tip passing an inch from his nose. He brought his sword around in a tight circle and stepped forward, slashing it down, only for it to clash into the prongs of the trident once again.

He locked his blade in, throwing all his strength into it, trying to snap his opponent's weapon with little more than brute force, leaning into one another. The hero said something, too low for anyone to hear, but whatever it was sent Achilles into a fury.

He lunged forward oddly recklessly, bringing his sword down with all his strength, so fast the hero barely had time to defend himself. The blade dug deep into the Warden's shoulder but his armour was thicker than it looked, protecting him from the worst of it.

“Hey.” A sudden voice said from behind them. Purpled strode over the rubble casually, hands in his pockets, looking refreshed. “Cool fight.”

“Where the fuck have you been!” Tommy dusted off his gloves, “Didn't you get the call?”

“Yeah what the fuck man.” Spark echoed behind him. Purpled gave him a lazy grin, taking a grappling hook off his belt, sighting down one eye.

“Eh, been here and there, you know how it is.” He tossed it up the clock tower, not even checking it made its mark, rappelling up to get a vantage point, disappearing out of their view again as if he was never there. Spark stared after him

“Strange kid.”

“Says you.”

“Uh, guys?” Void said uneasily, raising a hand. “We got bigger problems.” Tommy followed his finger to the far side of the square. Enforcers were running into position, armed and holding riot shields, aiming for the two metas locked in battle in the centre.

“Warden get out of there.” Android’s voice crackled over the comms. “They’re going to open fire.”

“I told them it was too dangerous.” The Warden snapped, his voice strained, digging his feet into the rubble as Achilles shoved him back. “And it’s useless.”

“Well they don’t seem to care who lives or fucking dies so long as they get the Syndicate.”

“They’re going to kill the wrong people.” Tommy pleaded. “There’s civilians at the other end, you got to stop them.”

“We can’t do anything. The Enforcers won’t listen to us, they never have.” He could hear the pain in the Captain’s voice, the same reflected in his own. They knew, they both knew that whatever respite the Enforcers aid had given, it was never going to last.

Gunfire echoed out across the plaza. “Get down!” Tommy slammed Void onto the floor, wincing as a wave of pain spread across his ribs. He pressed his head against the pavement, his mouth bone dry, feeling sick. The cold from the stone seeped into his skin but he didn’t dare move. Void was flat down, hands behind his head in the brace position.

“You good?” Tommy mouthed

Void shook his head. “You?”

Tommy didn’t reply, his hands shaking, and the other boy reached over, wrapping them in his own in some attempt to steady him, lying side by side, bullets whistling over their heads. It went from one warzone to another. There was no way of seeing what was going on, no way of knowing what was happening, if they were in a safe place, if Achilles had seen them. His heart was pounding in his chest.

“It’s so loud.” Tommy mouthed. Spark was curled up nearby. His eyes were squeezed shut, rocking himself back and forth.

He opened them slowly, looking over at them, breathing ragged. Ranboo held his other hand out wordlessly, and Eryn grabbed onto it like a lifeline, the three of them huddled behind the questionable shelter of the concrete slab, suddenly so incredibly young in the face of it all, tears running down Tommy’s cheeks.

It went on and on for what seemed like forever, but could have only been thirty seconds or so for all he knew. The barrage began to die down a little, but the damage was done, Spark was pale and shaking, Tommy numb, Void spaced out, trembling a little.

“Is it over?” He almost couldn’t hear the other meta, ears ringing.

“Boys move!” The Captain called over their comms. “Get out of there, now, get back to the barricade!”

He rose a little, searching around automatically for the comfort of a familiar blue jacketed figure, hoping against hope she'd made it out, half expecting not to find her. Void grabbed his arm, guiding his search over to the police blockade at the far end, knowing instinctively who he was looking for.

Kristin lay half hidden behind a patrol car, immediately recognisable from her lack of protective gear in comparison to the heavily armed officers around her. He immediately made a beeline for her, not caring who saw, jumping across the wreckage, boosting himself here and there to lift over the fires or twisted metal.

"I'm here!" He crouched down next to her. She was slumped against the door, one hand over her stomach, her eyes half lidded. "Hey."

"Hey." She took his hand gently. "You're safe."

"Well, not yet, but yeah." He replied, suddenly uneasy for some reason.

"You know I love you, don't you."

"I mean yeah, but we're working." He said, confused. "Why..." She moved her hand wordlessly, revealing a hole through the protective vest she wore, the edges stained dark. What little colour was left in his face drained. "Mum? What..."

"It's stab proof." She managed, tapping the material. "Not bulletproof, it was the best we had."

"You have bulletproof vests!"

"Not enough. I wasn't in the fight, my officers needed them more." She insisted.

"Clearly not!"

He looked around frantically as if he'd find something to help. "You're going to be fine." He promised. "You're going to be..." Her hand closed around his wrist. She raised her head slowly, looking over his shoulder, and he glanced back as a familiar dark shape rose from behind them, wearing a white opera mask, a cocky smile on his lips.

"Hello Theseus. Fancy seeing you here."

Tommy froze, staring at Orpheus. "You!" He shot a look back at Kristin, frantic, not wanting to take his eyes off the villain opposite him. "You did this!"

"She was caught in the crossfire." Orpheus said calmly, barely glancing at her. "It was nothing to do with me. Despite our earlier... encounter my fight isn't with you."

"But my fight is with you, bitch." Tommy snapped, surprising even himself with the venom in his voice, rising to his feet, reaching for his staff, flicking it out

"That isn't going to do anything against me."

"Do I look like I give a fuck."

He was toying with him, nothing more, a single word and he could have Tommy frozen, or worse, but instead he perched on the roof of a patrol car, completely oblivious to the destruction around them.

Tommy felt anger boil in his chest, a kind of rage bundling at the sheer arrogance of the other meta, fuelled by the panic for Kristin bleeding out behind him.

He lunged forward, propelled by little more than pure rage, bringing the staff down as hard as he could towards the villain's face. Orpheus dodged to the side deftly, grabbing his shoulder, shoving him away. *"I wouldn't do that if I were you."*

He was stuck in place, the staff falling from numb fingers. The Syndicate leader hopped down, studying him almost curiously. He leaned forward a little, and for a moment the shadow his mask cast shifted, enough so Tommy could actually see his eyes.

He felt a shudder go down his spine, for the first time seeing a glimpse of a real person behind the mask, oddly human, uncomfortably so.

"You're just a kid." A kind of realisation of his own seemed to dawn across Orpheus's face. "They said you were young, but you're just a kid."

"I'm not a fucking child! I'm done with your games, fight me!"

He drew back a little. "We don't fight children."

"Yeah I guess you just held a knife to Void's throat for fun." Tommy spat. "Don't fucking try that shit. I ain't falling for it."

The villain didn't reply, his grip tightening. Kristin shifted, trying to push herself up. Orpheus glanced back at her, and then did a double take.

"Stay away from her!" He shoved Orpheus back as hard as he could and the hold on him broke a little, allowing him to step away towards Kristin, shielding her. Something seemed to click in the villain's head. He looked at her, seeming to recognise her, and then back up at Theseus, drawing his arm away again. "Oh my god."

"What!"

"I'm so stupid. T-." He stopped whatever he was about to say. "You really are just a kid. "

"I'm not a fucking kid!"

Orpheus wavered; hand outstretched. "You. You shouldn't be here."

"Did I ask?"

"Go to sleep." The words washed over him, and he swayed on his feet. His arms grew heavy, and he tried to lurch forward, throwing one last desperate punch.

The villain dodged it easily, something unreadable in his expression but he couldn't make it out, his vision greying. He collapsed to the ground, and a hand lifted him, propping him against the car with surprising gentleness, safely out of the way of the crossfire.

“I’m sorry.” Orpheus whispered. “But my fight isn’t with you, you shouldn’t be here.”

“Don’t do this.” He was practically begging now. “Let me go.”

“I won’t hurt you. They’ll find you; I promise.” Tommy collapsed next to Kristin, one arm flung over her, fighting the compulsion with everything he had, but it wasn’t enough. The villain rose to his feet, walking away into the hazy distance, and Tommy broke down, tears streaming down his cheeks.

“Come back! Come back!”

Orpheus didn’t even seem to hear him. In the chaos and noise, the snap of gunfire and crackle of flames, one boy and his mother are easily forgotten, just another pair of bodies in the wreckage.

Chapter End Notes

Uh, oops?

Anyway please hold while I plug my socials

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We have theories, memes, memes about theories, a link to the spotify playlist for this fic and occasionally my rambling, new people are always welcome

Picking up the pieces

Chapter Summary

“Please stay still.” A warm glow spread over his shoulder, and some of the aching eased.
“Kristin Walters, where is she?” He tried again. “Please.”
“I need you to lie still for me.”
Tommy pushed himself up again. “Where is she? I need to know where she is.”

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

He woke to sudden silence compared to the virtual battlefield he'd left. It felt hollow and empty. A steady beeping cut into his awareness, his eyes clammed shut, aching all over.

Everything rushed back very suddenly, and he tore his eyes open. “You’re awake.” Supreme broke into a warm smile, sat next to him with a book in one hand, a cup of juice in the other. “Are you feeling better?”

“Where’s my mum?” He tried to sit up further. Supreme pressed a hand on his shoulder, pushing him back down gently.

“Please stay still.” A warm glow spread over his shoulder, and some of the aching eased.

“Kristin Walters, where is she?” He tried again. “Please.”

“I need you to lie still for me.”

Tommy pushed himself up again. “Where is she? I need to know where she is.”

“In a minute.” She promised him. “Take it easy.

“Please, can someone tell me where she is?” He begged. “Is she okay, I need to know.”

“I don’t know.” They said firmly. “I don’t have a clue, I’m sorry, but please just stay still, you need to take it easy.

“Can you find out?” He pushed.

“I’ll call the Captain, she’ll know.” He reached for his radio. “Puffy could I have you down in the med bay, Theseus is awake.”

“I’ll be there in a minute.” She responded very quickly. He blinked the last of the sleep away.

“And where’s R-Void?”

“Ranboo’s fine.” The healer assured him. “He’s still asleep, he’s fine as well, just worn out.” She tugged the curtain back, pointing at another curtained bed. “He’s just over there.” She held up a finger. “Wait, I needed to ask you something, I can’t remember what.” They frowned, trying to think.

“I remember!” They sat forward. “Puffy said you two are friends, did he give you any contact details for his family at all?”

“I didn’t know he had any family,” Tommy said, confused. “He never mentioned them.”

They looked surprised. “No?”

“No, and I never asked.”

“Well, we don’t actually know if he has a family.” Supreme corrected himself. “Because he signed up as an adult and we only found out later he wasn’t, hence he got taken off patrol and assigned with Tsunami until he turned 18, it was supposed to be a short-term thing.” They paused. “I mean, it certainly was, in the end.” A slightly guilty look crossed their face. “Sorry. Anyway, he told us he had a guardian, but he didn’t tell us who, and we never got contact details for them when he registered because we thought he was 18 and didn’t have to give us that information, so I was kind of hoping you would know.”

“I don’t, sorry.” Tommy glanced over at the curtains, resolving to ask him about that when he woke up.

“You’re finally awake I see.” Puffy strode in before he had time to think much deeper into that.

“Nerd.” He said automatically.

“If you get the reference you’re just as much of a nerd as I am.” She sat herself down on his other side.

“Do you....” He barely waited for her to finish speaking but she already knew what he was going to ask.

“She’s alive.” Sheer blind relief washed over him and he sunk down, the rush of adrenaline fading, giving way to sudden exhaustion.

“Can I see her? I need to see her.”

“You need to rest.” Ponk protested. “I had to use up some of your energy for healing, you’ll be tired.”

“Where is she?” He demanded. “Is she here?”

“She’s in St Mary’s,” Puffy told him calmly. “You’re in the Agency hospital wing, because it’s not safe for you in a normal hospital.”

Tommy blinked. “It just got blown up though?”

Ponk’s mouth thinned disapprovingly. “They covered the damaged areas with tarpaulin, cleared everything out, and carried on. City hospitals are at full capacity, they had no choice.”

“When can I see her?”

She paused for a few moments. "You know what, if you're up to it I'll take you in a minute, I was about to head out to get lunch anyway."

"He really shouldn't move." Ponk protested immediately. "All my work will be undone."

"This is important." Puffy rose to her feet. "We can go now, if you like, I don't have much longer on my break."

Tommy dragged himself up, tugging on a plain black hoodie left out for him, running a hand through his air to get it in line. "Done." He gave Ponk a winning smile before they could protest, hurrying after the Captain.

He hesitated by Ranboo's bed. "Can I?" Ponk nodded, and he pulled the curtain. The other boy lay very still, arms limp by his sides, a faint cut running down his cheek but nothing more dangerous that he could see. If it wasn't for the steady beep of the heart monitor, Tommy might have thought the worst, and even then, he was so very pale. Tommy wavered, torn. "Can...Can you ask him to call me when he wakes up, if he's up to it?"

"Of course. I mean if you want me to just pass a message onto him or something I can do that too." Ponk offered kindly.

"I don't know, he overthinks things, he might think I'm dead or something." He tried to play it off as casually as possible, but he wasn't all that good, Puffy giving him a knowing look.

"I will," Ponk promised. Tommy gave her a grateful smile, and they patted his shoulder. "Go on."

She led him downstairs and down a few corridors to a small indoor car park, the entrance hidden so heroes could enter and leave discreetly. Not that the car she led him to was exactly discrete, a small mini, a little battered and aged, painted bright pink.

Papers littered the floor, a few bags and clothes tossed over the seats, along with the remains of some takeaway boxes, a disordered mess.

"Sorry about this." She flushed red. "I keep meaning to clean it but I never have the time."

"It's fine." He shifted a stack of folders into the back seat, finding himself a seat, grabbing his seatbelt as they pulled out of the car park. The drive was in relative silence, Tommy staring out of the window, kicking his feet, not knowing what to say, both impatient and nervous.

"Mind if I turn some music on?" He nodded, not really listening, and she switched the radio on, humming along quietly, bobbing her head. It was oddly comforting, so he didn't really mind, the background noise helping to take his mind off things.

"There should be some water in the side if you need it." He dug into the side pocket, unearthing a bottle of water under a bag of sweets, which Puffy held her hand out for. He handed it over, and she waited until a red light, tearing it open and passing it back to him. "On second thoughts." She pulled into an open parking space suddenly, startling him. "I'll be back in a second."

"But..." She was already gone, the door slamming behind her, and he stared after her, confused.

A few minutes passed, and he flicked the radio on automatically, needing something to fill the silence, leg bouncing anxiously.

“Widespread destruction of homes and public buildings...” He switched over to another channel

“Casualties numbering in the double digits, with more going missing overnight, this is a tragedy the scale of which this city, this country has never seen.” Flick, another one

“Extensive damage to homes and property....” He shut it off quickly as Puffy pulled the door open, getting back in and handing him a plastic bag. He went to open it, confused.

“Just a sandwich and some snacks and things.” She told him. “You probably don’t have much appetite either, but you’ll thank me later.”

“You didn’t have to.”

“Yeah, but I wanted to,” She reached for her seatbelt, balancing another sandwich on her knee, “Plus I needed to grab some lunch for me as well, this is my break after all.”

“Thank you. For the food.” He said awkwardly. “And for skipping your lunch break for this.”

Her eyes sparkled. “I’ll make the Warden pay me extra for the extra time, don’t worry.”

“We aren’t paid by the hour?”

“I’ll find a way.” She joked, pulling out again. They arrived at the back of the hospital a few minutes later, the front of it was still cordoned off. A makeshift reception area had been set up at the back of the building, with cheap fold-out tables and picnic chairs. Puffy checked her phone and then sighed.

“No rest for the wicked. I have to rush back.” She said bitterly. “The Warden sent an urgent message. You can either stop by later, or you can stay here and I’ll send someone to pick you up as soon as someone’s free.”

“I’ll stay.” He said immediately. “Don’t worry.”

“I’ll keep you updated. Check your phone, I’ll message you a plan.”

“Will do.” He grabbed the plastic bag, stepping out. “Thank you.”

Her expression softened. “Any time sweetheart. Call me if you need me.”

He slammed his door shut over, rubbing his hands anxiously. A very worn-looking receptionist spotted him. “If you’re looking for your loved one, significant other, friend etc is alive the lists are over in the tent over there.” She said, bored, reciting a script. “If their name isn’t on the list, don’t panic, they may be at another hospital.”

“I know she’s here.” He said quickly. “I’m here to see Kristin Walters, which room is she in?”

“Kristin Walters?” She narrowed her eyes at him. “Who are you?”

“Her son.” He scrabbled in his pocket for his ID, but his fingers met nothing. “Tommy? I’m sorry I can’t find my ID right now.”

She checked her laptop quickly. “Forget it, there’s a note here to expect you.” She said bored. “She’s in one of the single rooms, 117, trauma unit.”

Tommy’s eyes widened slightly, and he turned on his heel, rushing inside. The corridors were crowded, a constant hum of machines and low voices, people bustling past.

Even though he hadn’t been here before it was clear enough it was busy, a kind of frantic buzz seeping through the corridors, he had to dodge past people, hopping out of the way more than once as a doctor or nurse rushed past, holding some kind of medical equipment or a clipboard.

He followed the signs on the ceiling up to the trauma ward, following it along to the end of a corridor, past wards packed with too many beds, keeping his head down. Someone was crying, someone else holding their hand.

Another room, a silent figure on the bed, another room, nurses crowding around someone, another room, he stopped looking, following the signs mindlessly to a small offshoot of a corridor, neatly hidden away.

Two officers stood outside the door, most likely a security detail. One moved in his way but the other waved his hand, recognising him, stepping aside, murmuring some kind of quiet condolences.

He barely heard her, rushing past, pushing the door open. It was a plain room, little more than a table and some plastic chairs, one next to the bed. Kristin lay there, propped up on cushions, wearing a hospital gown, linked up to all manner of machines. Her face was mostly hidden by an oxygen mask, but she looked so pale, completely still, her eyes closed.

Tommy felt tears well up, running over, sinking down next to her. “Mum?”

She was breathing, slowly but surely, the steady pulse of her heartbeat on the screen. He grabbed her hand, squeezing it gently. There was no reaction. It was warm, he had that reassurance, but she was too still, too quiet, the warmth and life that seemed to follow her around drained.

It had taken no time at all, he’d spoken to her hours before and she was smiling and talking to his friends, it had all been good. And then it all turned upside down, it all went wrong so fast. It wasn’t meant to be like this, she wasn’t meant to be there. He sunk down, silent tears streaming down his cheeks, of both relief and fear, clinging onto her hand like a lifeline.

A man in a white coat stepped inside, stopping when he saw the room was occupied. “Ah. You must be Tommy.”

Tommy sat up, immediately defensive, wiping his eyes aggressively. “How do you know that?”

“She woke up briefly after her surgery.” He explained. “She was asking for you.”

“Oh.” His eyes filled with fresh tears, and he blinked then back quickly. “What happened? Is she going to be okay?”

“She sustained a bullet wound to the chest, stomach, and leg. There was significant damage to her lungs and....”

“Just, give me the short of it.” He couldn’t listen to the list, the tone the doctor was taking indicated pretty clearly it was extensive.

“She’ll have trouble walking, breathing, and she lost a lot of blood so that has it’s own plethora of side effects...”

“Will she be alright?”

“I can’t say for certain, but with good physical therapy and care she should make a good recovery.” He said, sounding reasonably certain. Tommy sunk down in relief, and the doctor gave him a few moments

“There is one other thing.” He sat up, alarmed. “I’m sorry to bring this up. But we’ve contacted her insurance however as she wasn’t technically on duty they are questioning whether it’s their responsibility to cover this.” The doctor warned him. “I’m sorry, this isn’t the news you want to hear right now.”

“It’s alright, it’s not your fault.” He said, stunned.

“You don’t need to do anything now, but we’ll need to know what’s happening soon, as it will effect the care she’ll be able to access.” The doctor warned him.

“I...I’ll see what I can do.”

“Anyway, a nurse might be in later to check vitals but unless there’s anything else I’ll leave you to it.” He slumped down, tears in his eyes.

He pulled his phone out, half an idea coming to his head of calling Puffy, asking what he could do as he didn’t even know where to start. A notification flagged up immediately. Four missed calls, all from the same number, not one that he recognised or had in his contacts.

He pressed on it, probably against his better judgement but curiosity got the better of him. “Hullo?”

“Tommy?”

“Wilbur?”

There was an audible exhale of relief down the line. “Hi, Kristin gave me this number a while back, just in case, but she wasn’t responding.” He explained. “Are you alright? I saw the news, it was by the place you said you lived, you were safe right? You’re alright?” Tommy was silent, not knowing what to say, and Wilbur’s voice turned more concerned. “Tommy? Where are you?”

“In St Mary’s.” He said glumly

“Are you hurt?” Will sounded urgent. “Tommy are you alright?”

“I’m fine.” He put his head in his hands. “I got away with a few bruises, Kristin, she wasn’t as lucky.”

“Oh my god.” Horror entered his voice. “Is she...”

“She’s alive. But she’s unconscious, the hospital is overwhelmed, and she was off duty so her insurance is being funny about paying, I don’t know what to do.” The words spilled out of him like a lid was lifted. He curled into a ball, hugging his legs to his chest. “I don’t know what to do.”

“Hold on.” A rustling sound came down the call, like the mic being covered, and muffled voices discussed something for a few moments. The phone changed hands at some point, as a new voice joined

“Hey Tommy, it’s Phil.”

“Hi old man.” He managed. For once Phil didn’t take the bait.

“Wilbur’s just gone to get ready, we’ll be with you soon, alright? Take care.”

“Wait what?”

“Which hospital are you at?”

“Wh... You don’t have to...”

“Dad he’s at St Mary’s!” Wilbur’s voice called from somewhere distant.

“Alright, we’ll be there soon.” Phil said. “See you in a bit.” The call cut off, and he put his phone down, feeling very confused. He pulled the sandwich out, making a weak attempt at eating it, no appetite at all.

He ended up just putting it back in the packaging and putting it away, unable to stomach more than a few bites. The nurse came in after a little while, checking her vitals silently. He barely noticed her, spacing out a little.

There was a muffled yell, and he looked up to see Wilbur waving through the door, a wide grin on his face. He pushed it open and the nurse stepped in the way. “I’m sorry, it’s family only.”

“We’re family friends.” Wilbur said quickly. “We came to bring some things.” He held up the basket.

“I must insist...”

“It’s okay.” Tommy piped up. “They can come in.” Wilbur didn’t wait for him to confirm, pushing past.

“Tommy!” He trotted over. “Are you alright?”

“I’m fine. Why are you here?”

“To see you, of course.” He sat himself down on the chair next to him, setting a bag down, Phil slipping in behind him in a more restrained fashion.

“Hi Tommy. How are you doing?” He just gave him a thumbs up. “Do you mind if I...” Phil hesitated, looking at him for permission. He hesitated for a second, and then nodded, not really

knowing how to say no. Phil crossed the room, taking Kristin's other hand gently, sitting down quietly, gazing at her sadly.

Tommy averted his gaze, suddenly feeling like he was interrupting something, despite being there first

"How did you know something was up?" He asked, trying to break the ice somehow.

"We didn't." Phil took a warm blanket out of the bag Wilbur held, putting it around Tommy's shoulders before he could protest. "Found out areas affected on the news; Wilbur put the dots together."

They fell into a kind of awkward silence for a few moments. "I can get you something from the coffee shop across the street?" Wilbur offered, looking anxious hopping from foot to foot. "Not caffeine, but if you want hot chocolate or something I can run down."

"Why are you being so nice?" Tommy asked, confused. "You haven't called me a child once."

"You just got caught in an attack and your mum is badly injured," Phil interjected calmly before he could say anything. "Even Wilbur has limits on when he'll be annoying."

Tommy shuddered dramatically. "It's weird."

"You don't have to worry about him insulting you. It's when he's only ever polite to you, that means he hates you." Phil informed him. He hadn't really taken his eyes off Kristin, only really half paying attention to the conversation. Tommy wrinkled his nose.

"That sounds complicated."

"I mean seeing as Phil and Kristin are going to get married, we'll be brothers soon." Wilbur told him cheerfully. "So I have to start being nice to you at some point."

"Wilbur! We're just friends." Phil objected immediately, looking horrified, finally looking up. Wilbur rolled his eyes, patting Tommy's head. Maybe it was the confusion, and the hurt, and the stress of the last few days, maybe he was just too tired to protest, but he couldn't find the energy to tell him to stop.

A brother suddenly didn't seem so bad, although he could think of many better alternatives to Wilbur, he'd have Ranboo over Wilbur he decided.

They liked similar things, and he was a pushover, he could blame everything on him. Kristin would never believe him but it would be funny. And he didn't have to lie to Ranboo.

The feeling curdled in his stomach all of a sudden, the brutal reminder he had to be careful around the Watsons, he'd still have to lie. He couldn't ever know how they'd react, or if the Agency would be.

Having to lie, having to hide, he was sick of it, but there was no other way, they could never know Theseus, and Theseus would never get a chance to meet them. He pulled the blanket he'd been given tighter around his shoulders, staring blankly into the near distance.

“Tommy can I have a word with you?” Phil broke into his rapidly spiralling trail of thought. Tommy nodded mutely, and he sat down opposite, clasping his hands on his lap. “How are you doing?”

Tommy shrugged non-committedly, clinging onto Kristin’s hand. “As your mother isn’t conscious I’m going to have to ask you some questions.”

He looked up, worried. “What kind of questions.”

“As her next of kin you get some say in medical decisions, right?”

He shifted in his seat, uncomfortable. “I don’t like where this is going.”

Phil laid his hand on Tommy’s wrist, trying to reassure him. “It’s not like that. I can take her out of here, have her moved to a private hospital.”

“We don’t have that kind of money,” Tommy said sadly.

“I do.”

He looked up sharply, and the older man held up a cautionary hand. “Don’t make this decision based on the money.” He added. “I promise that’s not a concern for me.”

“What do you want in return?”

“Nothing.” Tommy opened his mouth but Phil held his hand up again. “No, absolutely nothing. The hospital is already overwhelmed, as soon as I’m done here, I’ll go make a similar offer to any of the other critical patients that need it to help take pressure off the hospital, but you and your mother are of first priority to me.”

“Why?” He was too tired to even pretend to beat around the bush, jumping straight to the point. “People don’t just give stuff for free, that’s not how it works.”

“I care about you too, Tommy.” He said finally. “You’ve made such a difference to Wilbur, and I know we haven’t spoken as much as I’d like to, but I’ve heard a lot about you from my boys, you and your mother both seem like lovely people. I’d like to make sure you’re safe.”

Tommy sniggered. “Never been described as lovely before.”

“Look.” Phil sighed. “I’m not good at this.”

“No, you aren’t.”

He backtracked, trying a different tactic. “I mean look at it this way, as much as I hate to frame it like this, it’s either this, or bear the brunt of whatever extensive costs insurance decides to leave you. I can do some wrangling behind scenes, I can get her put on my insurance, it’ll all be covered, you won’t have to worry.”

“What’s the catch? There has to be a catch.” Tommy insisted. “There always is.”

"I mean." He glanced over at his son. "You might have to deal with Will a little more often as we'll probably drop in and out, I'd say that's a..."

"Absolutely not." Tommy interrupted, smiling slightly. "That's unacceptable."

Phil's eyes widened a little. "I...I mean if you really feel that way..."

"Dad he's joking." Will cut in. "You are joking, aren't you?"

Tommy chewed his lip. "Would I be able to visit her?"

"Huh?"

"In the other hospital." He explained. "Would I be able to visit?"

"You can visit her whenever you want. You'll even be able to stay with her." He tightened his grip on her hand, not knowing what to say

"I can give you time to think." Phil offered. "I don't know how long you have until they start making demands for her treatment to be covered, but I'll give you as long as I can."

He rubbed his eyes, finally breaking, exhausted. "You know what, I don't even care if you want something in return. Please, help her."

"Of course." He stood immediately, reaching for his phone. "I'll sort it out now." He began to type in a number, heading for the door.

"Would you have done it anyway, if I refused?" Tommy blurted out, a sudden thought coming to mind. Phil looked a little guilty.

"I mean, yes but I wanted to at least try to get your permission first."

"I don't know how I feel about that." He said bluntly. "Kind of a dick move."

"We both want the best for her." He assured him. "I just wanted to make sure."

An arm wrapped around his shoulder, and he was pulled back into a familiar yellow sweater, without the energy to really fight back against it, even though he felt like he should. "We've got you." Will promised him, "It'll be okay."

He didn't really believe him but it was nice to pretend, just for a little while. He could blame it on the painkillers, or the stress or something when this was all over, but for now he let himself lean against the older boy's shoulder, let himself accept the hug, let Wilbur take the weight for a little while because it was easier that way, easier to let someone else hold him up because he wasn't quite sure he knew how anymore.

Chapter End Notes

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We have theories, memes, memes about theories, a link to the spotify playlist for this fic and occasionally my rambling, new people are always welcome

I just wanted to say, it is so nice seeing people coming back in the comments. I recognise recurring usernames, it's still so strange to me that people are invested in this and following it along, I fully expected that no one would ever see it so having this group of people appear out of nowhere as someone who overthinks their writing a lot has been very reassuring

Chapter 25

Chapter Summary

“I’m back, bitch!” Tommy declared loudly, and the pair looked up. Ponk excused himself quietly with a pat of Ranboo’s shoulder, and the other boy stood.

“Hi Theseus.” There was a moment where they both stood still, staring at each other, before Ranboo ran over, pulling him into a tight hug before he could stop him. “Thank god you’re okay.”

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

“Tommy?” He was broken out of a light doze by his name being called. “Hey.” Puffy waved at him. “Oh.” She suddenly noticed the others in the room. “I wasn’t expecting anyone else.”

“Neither was I.” Tommy drawled, rubbing the sleep from his eyes.

“Phil, and this is my son Wilbur, we’re family friends.” Phil introduced himself, rising to his feet. Puffy’s eyes lingered on Phil for a few moments, quietly sizing him up.

“Nice to meet you, I’m Puffy.”

“I can see that.” Wilbur chimed in with a mischievous grin, earning himself a laugh, Puffy running her hand through the mane of hair on her head, shaking it out.

“Never heard that one before.”

“Are we heading back?” He said glumly, getting to his feet.

“I can drop you back off later, we just need to sort some things out.” She promised.

“I’ll send you a text later of some documents I’ll need if that’s alright.” Phil said quietly. Puffy frowned.

“What documents do you need? We might have to stop by your house.”

“He’s sorting out covering treatment, cos insurance was being difficult.” Tommy explained. She warmed to him instantly, the tension going out of her shoulders.

“Oh that’s kind.” She ruffled Tommy’s hair. “I’m glad you’ve got someone else looking out for you.”

“Fuck off.” He grumbled, but it was reasonably good-natured.

“Come on then, we need to go.” She guided him back downstairs to the car, waiting until they were out of earshot. “I was going to let you stay longer but the Warden wants everyone back for a meeting, he wasn’t taking exceptions.”

“It’s fine.” It wasn’t fine, but he didn’t have much choice in the matter. Puffy seemed to understand that though, she radiated a kind of concerned understanding, keeping a motherly eye on him every now and then, making sure he had water and some snacks for the drive.

“Phil seems nice enough.” She began, trying to get some conversation out of him, pulling out of the car park.

“Eh. I don’t really know him.”

She glanced over, a little concerned. “I thought you said they were family friends?”

“He’s friends with my mum, they met through work.” He leaned his hand out of the window, the wind brushing his fingers as they drove through the town. “I don’t know him all that well, she’s the one who knows him.”

Puffy arched an eyebrow. “Huh.”

“Don’t be fucking weird.” He snapped. “It’s not like that.”

“I’m messing with you kid.” She said warmly. “Don’t worry about it. You seem to get on well with, what was his name? The son?”

“Wilbur.” Tommy replied. “Don’t like Wilbur.”

“You were asleep on his shoulder.”

“I was dozing.” He countered. “It’s different.”

She laughed, shaking her head, eyes on the road. “If you say so.”

The streets were utterly deserted, he hadn’t noticed on the way in, he’d been so focused on getting there. Barely any cars were driving, there wasn’t much in the way of pedestrians and most of the shops were shut even though it was a week day.

It felt odd, and empty, even at the quietest times the city was still buzzing, but this was silent, the sirens had gone quiet, the car horns gone, no commuters chatting or music playing. The only people he could really see were Enforcers, patrolling every street, through the park, coming out of the mall.

They were everywhere, in far larger numbers than normal, most heavily armed in some way, stopping random passers-by, standing at roadblocks towards areas that had been hit. He felt an odd chill down his spine, keeping his head down for the rest of the drive.

Tommy made a beeline for the medical wing as soon as they got back, barely remembering to grab his spare mask from his locker, putting it on and waving Puffy goodbye as they parted on the stairs, throwing the door open.

Ranboo was sat on the bed talking to Ponk quietly, the curtains pulled away now. He looked much better, alert, though still a little tired

“I’m back, bitch!” Tommy declared loudly, and the pair looked up. Ponk excused themselves quietly with a pat of Ranboo’s shoulder, and the other boy stood.

“Hi Theseus.” There was a moment where they both stood still, staring at each other, before Ranboo ran over, pulling him into a tight hug before he could stop him. “Thank god you’re okay.”

“I’m okay? Bitch you weren’t even awake for hours.”

Ranboo stepped back, giving the younger a careful look over. “Basically armageddon was going on, one moment you were next to me, the next moment Orpheus was there, the commissioner wasn’t answering her radio and no one could find you, I think I had more reason to be worried.”

“You didn’t call, Supreme said you’d call when you woke up.” Tommy complained. “Don’t start on me.”

“My phone was damaged in the attack and I didn’t know your number.” He admitted. “I’m fine though, I’m here now.” He adjusted his mask, pulling it up a bit. “Apparently we’ve got a meeting in a bit.”

Tommy commandeered Ranboo’s hospital bed, leaning back against the pillows. “Yeah, Puffy dragged me back here for it.”

“What are you doing after?”

He shrugged. “Dunno. Going home I guess.”

Ranboo froze slightly. “Oh. You don’t know.”

“Don’t know what?” He sat up. “What is it?”

“Uh. They didn’t manage to put the fire out in time.” Ranboo said awkwardly. “I mean it’s fixable, but not liveable right now, and a lot of your things are smoke or water damaged from the fire hoses I went to check while I was waiting for you to come back, because I was checking mine.”

Tommy stared at him. “You’re joking.”

“I wish I was.”

His lip trembled slightly. He swore loudly, throwing himself back against the cushions before the other boy saw him crying. “You’re fucking kidding me. Everything I owned was there.”

“You’re alive, that’s what counts I guess?”

“Try and sound a little more convincing.” Tommy said snappishly. He buried his face into the pillows, balling the corner up into his fist. “This is a fucking joke.”

“We did well, for what we were up against.” He said kindly. “We couldn’t save it all.”

“I know but...” he exhaled. “You said it could be fixed?”

“It’s damage to the roof, they haven’t cordoned it off completely like the others.”

“I hope I’m not interrupting anything, but it’s nearly time to go.” Ponk said cautiously from behind them. Tommy nodded, wiping his eyes on his sleeve abruptly, taking a deep breath. “You alright?” They asked, concerned. “I can try and ask if you...”

“He won’t let me out of the meeting.” Tommy interrupted. “If he’s dragging me away from my mum’s hospital bed for this, he won’t let me get out now I’m here.” Ponk didn’t argue with that, following them up to the top floor. She pushed the door open, stepping aside to let them in.

There weren’t many people there yet, just the three of them, and Spark in the corner, Rose standing to one side on her own, holding onto a small white square of plastic for some reason. Tommy found himself a place on a table pushed against the back, safely out of the way of the main meeting table, but a good enough vantage point that he could see everything that went on.

“Oh, I was supposed to ask, Ponk wanted to know contact details for your family.” He pulled his legs up, leaning back. “You know if anything happens again. Also, what did he mean about you lying about your age?” The curiosity got the better of him

“I thought you knew.” Ranboo sat against the wall. “Yeah I signed up as an adult, didn’t want to be an apprentice, and it’s better paid.” He looked a bit guilty. “They caught me though, and put me with Niki because I didn’t need much training and she already had you so it wasn’t like they were asking someone to just learn how to train someone out of nowhere.”

“You just don’t seem like someone who’d lie about that?”

He shrugged, watching Punz and Purpled trail in, the latter looking very subdued for once. “Just needed the money.”

“How’s the Warden, he was caught in the middle of it all.” Tommy tried to change the subject, watching Purpled head to the other side of the room, keeping his head down, a few accusing glares being levelled his way.

“Oh he’s fine, he just put a shield up.” Ranboo frowned. “I haven’t seen him at all actually. But I did only wake up like two hours ago.”

Spark leaned over. “Blaze says he’s been locked up in his office.” He said in a conspiratorial whisper. “Not even the Captain could get him out.”

“Thank you for coming at such short notice.” The Captain raised her voice, sitting down as the room came to order, the last few people filing in. “The Warden will be with us in a minute, but you all already know what we’re here to talk about.”

There were a few murmurs of agreement around the table.

“No one sustained major injuries, luckily.” She continued. “If it wasn’t for the quick response time of the Enforcers we’d have been in a much worse position.”

Punz snorted, “Look at us, praising Enforcers.”

“Whatever you think of them, things could have been much worse yesterday without them.” The door opened, the Warden entering silently, out of armour for once, in a green t-shirt and black cargo trousers, a plain black mask over his face.

He didn’t seem to have slept much, acid green hair messy, or perhaps the loss of his armour took away a lot of the mystique Tommy had come to associate with him. He just looked like a man, tired and with the weight of the world on his shoulders, nodding at Puffy as he came in. Supreme reached out, squeezing his hand, giving him a small burst of healing.

The Warden stood up a little straighter, giving him a quick squeeze back with a fond smile. The interaction going mostly unnoticed by most at the table, again, unusual for someone they all tended to notice when he entered a room.

“How did they do all that, completely undetected, that’s what I want to know.” Punz leaned back in his seat, watching as the Warden sat down. “Multiple firebombs, in multiple locations, plus good old explosives in the hospital, didn’t get caught placing any of them, we didn’t have a fucking clue it was happening.” He spread his hands. “Not even following their normal pattern, normally we have a few months in between attacks, the last one was barely a month ago.”

“They’re always one step ahead of us.” Blaze agreed. “How.”

“We know they have an advanced tech team, what are the chances they’ve made their way into our systems?” Android asked. “Because I haven’t been able to monitor communications as much as I’d like to recently.”

“Our communications are sound.” The Captain insisted. “We’re a closed network, the only way to get in would be to have someone on the inside. That’s harder, but we can’t rule it out.”

“I trust everyone in this room.” The Warden said finally, speaking for the first time that day. “All were personally chosen by me, and vouched for by other members of the council.”

“Is there a chance you made a mistake?” 404 asked boldly.

“No. None.”

“Then the only people I don’t know about are you two.” Blaze turned, pointing at Tommy and Ranboo suddenly, “You’re the newcomers here but...”

“You really think we would be helping the people who killed Tsunami.” Tommy cut him off hotly. “Are you fucking stupid or something?”

“Theseus.” Puffy said warningly. “Let’s keep that kind of language to ourselves.”

“Am I wrong?” He challenged her. “Come on, it was a fucked-up thing to say and you know it.”

“In Theseus’s defence, you’d know if he held any opinions against the Agency.” Ranboo said dryly. “Because he says whatever he thinks, immediately.”

“Go fuck yourself.”

“I rest my case.” There was soft laughter around the table, the tension breaking, and Tommy allowed himself a slight smile, punching his partner in the shoulder. Blaze held up his hands, trying to defend himself.

“I’m not saying I don’t trust them, I do, I’m just saying if it was anyone, it would be them as I trust everyone else here implicitly, I just haven’t known them as long. As you rightly pointed out, the chances are tiny, so looking for a traitor here isn’t going to help anyone.”

Rose raised a hand quietly. “I don’t know if I should be here.”

“Why not?” The Warden queried

She looked at the table, not meeting his gaze. “I got my citizen’s license this morning.” She held up a small card, the piece of plastic she’d been playing with as they walked in. “They agreed my powers are too weak to be a threat to anyone, and I wasn’t strong enough for the Agency so they finally let me get it.”

There was silence, the Warden leaning on his trident. The room held it’s breath, waiting for his reaction. “The timing of it is questionable, but I’m happy for you.” He said finally. “What now?”

“Well, I guess this is my resignation. I got a job lined up at a bank the other side of town, they need security and I heard they’re not too bad with metas so there I guess.”

“Alright, we can sort the details out later, if you want to leave.” There was an odd note in his voice, but he covered it up well as she stood up slowly. There was quiet applause, smiles breaking out, a few people leaning over to congratulate her. She looked a little teary, hugging the Captain, whispered promises to talk later passing over the table.

“Why is it a problem?” Ranboo whispered. “I don’t get it.”

“They wanna weaken the Agency.” Tommy explained. “That’s why they only did it now.”

“Huh. Politics.”

“Yeahhh.”

It was bittersweet, watching her leave with the tiny card that signalled her freedom, something most people in the room would never have, and that she only earned after crippling her wings perhaps beyond repair.

“On that note.” The Warden said once the door had closed. “I think the apprentices should leave. We’re going to discuss details of the attack, which aren’t things you need to hear.”

“Aw come on man.” Purpled sat up. “We’re fine, we’ll have to see it sooner or later.”

“You weren’t even there for most of it, shut up.” Spark shot back.

“Not my fault the battery in my comms was faulty!”

“The battery was fine, just say you didn’t hear it.” Android interrupted. “I’m with the Warden, you don’t need to see this.”

“I can stay.” Tommy protested. “I can help,”

“Theseus you in particular.” The Warden cut in. “You have enough on your plate.”

“Aw come on, that’s not…”

“That’s not an insult.” Puffy interrupted him wearily. “You’ve handled the death of your tutor, a gang shootout and a terrorist attack in the last few weeks alone, go home. We’re not paying you enough for full time and I have no intention of getting into legal trouble.”

Tommy rolled his eyes, sliding down off the table. “And there was me thinking you were concerned for my health.”

“That too.”

“Come on.” Spark caught his arm, tugging him out before he could get involved in any more arguments. He let himself be dragged out, not really too keen on fighting back for once, worn out, dragging his feet along the corridor.

“You’re heading back to the hospital now, right?” Ranboo asked as they headed back down

“Yeah.” He looked back up the stairs. “Gotta wait for Puffy though, that could be a while.”

“I can take you now,” He volunteered.

“Right now?”

“Sure, don’t see why not. Where are we going?”

“St Mary’s, just drop me nearby.” He said. “I know my way in.” He reached out.

“Don’t forget your mask, don’t want people seeing that.” Tommy snatched it off, stuffing it in his pockets, holding his hand out again. The teleport was starting to get easier, especially with the amount they’d been jumping around lately, not much more than butterflies now. They set down on the far side of the square, in the shelter of an alleyway.

“Which room is it?” Tommy narrowed his eyes, pointing up at one on the far side of the hospital. Ranboo studied it for a few moments and then nodded. “Tell me if anyone is in there with you, cos I don’t want to teleport in and there’s a doctor or someone.”

“Wait you’re leaving?” Tommy asked, confused.

“I’ll be back in a bit, I promise.” He waved, vanishing around the corner, leaving Tommy to find his own way back up.

The room was empty this time, the Watsons clearly having left at some point. A bunch of fresh lilacs had been left by the bed in a vase that he could only assume had been Phil’s, the blanket they’d

bought left as well, along with a bag with a few sandwiches and snacks, labelled with his name.

He took it, surprised by the thoughtfulness of it all, sitting back down and pulling out his phone

Purple particles gathered in the centre of the room and Ranboo stepped back out, holding a white box. "I bought doughnuts." He set the box down on the bed between them. "Figured we could both do with sugar."

"Fuck yes." Tommy threw the box open, snatching one. "You're the best." He dug into it, getting powdered sugar all over his clothes but he didn't care. Ranboo took a chocolate one out, giving him an odd look as he picked out all the jam-filled ones.

"Of all things."

"What? A man can like his strawberry jam."

"Jelly." Ranboo corrected automatically

"Jelly! Who the fuck calls it jelly, it's jam you fucking weirdo." He pointed the doughnut at him. "Say that again and I'll fucking punt you."

"Alright, alright." He backed off rapidly. "Jam, got it." He hesitated, glancing over at the bed, and then back again. "Soooo. How are you doing?"

"I got shot two days ago, they think there's a mole in the Agency, my mum is in hospital, how do you think I'm doing."

"I'm so sorry."

"Everyone's sorry!" He burst out. "What the fuck does it change!" He slumped forward. "Sorry. Shouldn't have yelled."

"No, no it's fine." He paused. "Can I hug you?" He nodded, exhausted, and Ranboo's arms closed around him, pulling him over. He collapsed against his friend's shoulder, burying his head in his arm. They sat in silence for a while, under the hum of the extractor fan, the steady beat of the heart monitor becoming oddly reassuring.

"I miss her." He said tiredly. "Niki'd know what to do."

"I miss her too." Ranboo agreed. "It was nice to have someone who cared about us."

Tommy nodded, resting his head against his shoulder. "You get it."

"Do you think we'll ever get a new mentor?"

"Warden seemed pretty against it and I don't want anyone else." Tommy declared fiercely. "I want Tsunami."

"I'm sorry."

He rolled his eyes, hard. “Still not your fault boob boy.”

“Please don’t call me that.”

“I’ll stop calling you that when you stop apologising for things that aren’t your fault.”

There was a pause, and then a slight laugh over his head. “Touché.”

They went quiet again, “She’d always stuck up for us.” Ranboo said finally

“Never took any of the transfer offers, cos they’d all make me actually work, she was fun,” Tommy said, trying to stay light-hearted

“She wanted us to have the chances she didn’t get. You saw how stressed she was.” Ranboo pointed out. Tommy looked up, opened his mouth, and then closed it.

“I. I didn’t even realise. I thought she just did it, I didn’t think of it that way”

“Why else? She stood up to the Warden for us, made sure we didn’t work as many hours, didn’t let him shove new districts on us, stopped him from shifting us to other heroes.” He picked up another doughnut, lost in thought.

“I liked it when she shouted at the Warden.” Tommy tried to make light again, feeling horribly out of his depth in all of the emotional talk and it worked, a smile drawing across the other boy’s mouth.

“Me too.”

He sobered slightly. “We don’t have that now.”

“I mean. I heard you’re good at shouting at people.”

“I’m not ready for that.” He sighed. “I’m fucking tired, enough depressing talk.” He closed his eyes, kicking his legs up on the chair next to him. The exhaustion took him quickly, and he dozed off again, the low hum of the fan lulling him to sleep.

Chapter End Notes

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Can’t believe I accidentally predicted Hannah’s wings being torn up in lore, this chapters been written for weeks.

Seeing as there's more and more people here I just wanted to say again, if you want to make anything inspired by this fic, art or writing or anything feel free! I love just seeing people theorise, so if you create anything, please let me know! Send it in the discord, @ me on twitter, I'd love to see it! Thank you for all the support and comments, it means the world 🥰

Ash and Soot

Chapter Summary

“You can’t stay here.” Wilbur pressed. “And you won’t be able to go to the other hospital until she’s settled in.”

“I can’t go back either.”

“Why not?”

“I. Well our house kinda.... got damaged.” He admitted, staring at the ground pointedly.

“Tommy!” Wilbur exclaimed

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

“Hi.” A voice said over his head.

“Hello.” Footsteps tread over. “Is he asleep?”

“No, he’s awake, kinda. Just pretending to be asleep.”

“Fuck off,” Tommy mumbled.

“Phil’s just heading up.” He pulled his eyes open, sitting up and Ranboo took his arm away. “You awake?”

He gave Wilbur a thumbs up, looking around. Kristin was just as still as she was before, though a few nurses were stood around her bed now, talking in hushed voices. He couldn’t see what they were doing but it didn’t seem urgent so he didn’t let himself worry about it too much, hushed voices

A newspaper had been left discarded on the table. He leaned over, to see Lethe’s odd white mask, completely expressionless, stared back at him. ‘The Ghost of the Syndicate’, the title declared, in big bold letters. ‘How much has the Agency really hidden from us’. He tossed it aside without another thought, not wanting to read whatever garbage it had to offer.

“The ambulance is going to be here in a minute to transfer hospitals,” Wilbur told him quietly. “Dad’s just sorting the last few things out with the doctors.” He frowned. “You look exhausted.”

“Stop fussing.” He said irritably. “I’m fine.”

Will looked him over critically. “Did you sleep here?”

“Why’s it any of your business.”

“You can go back home, I can drop you off, or one of us can stay with you if you don’t want to be alone.” He offered.

“I’m fine.”

“You can’t stay here.” Wilbur pressed. “And you won’t be able to go to the other hospital until she’s settled in.”

“I can’t go back either.”

“Why not?”

“I. Well, our house kinda.... got damaged.” He admitted, staring at the ground pointedly.

“Tommy!” Wilbur exclaimed

“What?” Will grabbed his shoulders, kneeling down to his height.

“Why didn’t you say something?”

Tommy scuffed his shoe against the floor, shrinking down. “Dunno.”

“He’s embarrassed,” Ranboo remarked. “Not that it was his fault or anything but you know.”

“Shut up boob boy.”

“Please stop calling me that.”

Wilbur sighed. “I have to talk to Dad about this.”

“No, no it’s fine.” He shrugged him off, trying to stand up but Will pulled him back down.

“I’m serious. You know what, I’m sorting this now.”

He stepped outside, the door swinging shut, and Tommy turned on Ranboo. “Why did you have to say that?”

“You can’t sleep here.” He replied bluntly. “It’s just plastic chairs, you’re still worn out, you got shot like two, three days ago.”

“I could just go to yours?”

He looked very awkward. “I mean. You don’t have a house, it’ll probably be a long term thing and I don’t have a lot of space, or much food in the flat so it wouldn’t be great.”

“Oh. Right. Sorry.”

“It’s fine man, I mean they seem nice.” He tried

“I don’t really know them. Kristin knew them, I don’t.” Tommy said desperately. “What am I meant to do.”

Right on cue, Wilbur burst back in, coat flying out behind him. "You're staying at ours. Come on."

"What!" Tommy stared at him, not really taking in

"We have a spare room, Techno's setting it up now."

"I can't just go back with you." He protested. "I've literally only met you a few times."

"Well, your mum actually kinda gave my dad guardianship over you if anything happened to her. So I mean there's that."

Tommy's mouth dropped open. "She did WHAT!"

"I know, I know." Wilbur held his hands out defensively. "I only just found out as well."

"When." He shot to his feet. "What do you mean?"

"I don't know, you'll have to ask Dad to explain when he gets back, but it's fine, it's just temporary. If you're really unsure Dad can give your friend.." He waved vaguely in Ranboo's direction.

"Ranboo." Tommy supplied.

"Dad can give Ranboo the address and contact details and everything."

"It's fine." Tommy said quickly. "Don't worry about it."

"Look, we'll go to your house, pick up some things, and that'll give Techno time to tidy out the spare room."

"I don't know if..."

"We can get food on the way?"

He hesitated for a moment. "Fine." He gave in a little too easily, secretly a little relieved to get out of the room. He was torn, he wanted to stay but the constant beeping of the machine, and Kristin's stillness was starting to get to him a little. He trailed after Wilbur, making a bit of a show of dragging his feet down to the car park.

Wilbur had a slightly beat up looking car, although much tidier than Puffy's.

"I thought you'd have something fancier."

Wilbur grinned. "They don't trust me with anything fancier. My driving is...eccentric. Want the aux?" Tommy snatched it triumphantly, plugging his phone in, deciding to ignore whatever that meant.

He began searching for the most obnoxious songs he could find, glancing over at Will from time to time to see his reaction. Wilbur pressed back a smile, clearly very aware of what he was trying to do.

He swerved suddenly, making Tommy grab onto the dashboard to steady himself, pulling into a drive through.

"I'm starting to see what eccentric means." Tommy let go of it slowly.

“I’m being careful today, don’t worry.” Wilbur said cheerfully. He leaned over to the drive through window. “A fried chicken wrap.” he glanced over his shoulder. “What do you want?”

“Uh.” He stared at the menu

“Fries, everyone likes fries. We’ll have some fries.” Wilbur said. “What do you want, milkshake, what?”

“Burger? Strawberry milkshake?”

“Strawberry? Strange child.” But he didn’t say anything else, relaying the order to the window. Tommy yawned, glancing at a message from Tubbo.

“Everyone’s giving me food today. I could get used to this.”

It was pretty empty, no one else was really out and about so they didn’t have to wait long. Will passed his food over, taking a bite out of his wrap. “Eat in the car, just don’t make too much of a mess.” Tommy complied hungrily, nearly inhaling his at record speed, eyeing Wilbur’s chips. The older boy pushed them over without a word.

“You sure?”

“I’ve had lunch, you probably haven’t.” He kept one eye on the road, wrap held in his other hand slightly haphazardly.

They pulled into his street, and Tommy felt the air rush out of his chest. Around the smouldering remains of the police station there was nothing. Little more than shells left, a few residents picking over the wreckage under the watchful eye of the Enforcers patrolling the area.

Smoke still rose off one or two, nothing remaining where he’d left a perfectly normal street the day before. Otherwise, it was utterly deserted.

He almost didn’t recognise his own home. The roof was half collapsed in, the walls relatively intact but a few were stained black with smoke. It was still standing, which was more than could be said of some houses, but it still hadn’t survived untouched. He hopped out, staring at it, walking towards the gate.

“I’m sorry, you can’t go in there.” An Enforcer strode up, looking at him suspiciously.

“It’s my house.” Tommy said quickly. “We’re just here to get some things.” The Enforcer stepped away, talking quietly into his radio for a moment

“Fine. Just avoid the top floor. We’re not liable for any accidents.” Tommy barely waited for permission, running up the path. There was no need to open the door, it had been smashed down, either by firefighters or something else he didn’t know.

The bottom floor was reasonably intact, but here and there water had leaked through the ceiling. Everything was either covered in water or stunk of smoke, and it got worse on the second floor, the roof of his room blackened.

He tried to keep his head down, ignoring as much of it as possible. Even if it was fixed, it would never be the same, and he couldn't help but feel an odd sense of loss settling in his chest. The fire hadn't even taken much, but photos, books, electronics were all water damaged.

The carpet was soaked through it, and there was no way of drying it, it would be ruined in a few days. He had only been thinking about the fire, he hadn't even stopped to consider this would happen.

"Some stuff might be missing." Wilbur joined him, holding out a face mask to help with the leftover smoke. Tommy pulled it on, relieved, but the stench stayed hanging in the air. "There was some looting here early this morning, Enforcers ran them off, and shot a couple actually but apparently they got away with some things."

Tommy shuddered, a cold feeling running up his spine. "That's awful."

"I mean, preying on people losing their homes is pretty shit, but you're right, they didn't deserve that." He ducked under a low beam. "Just get what's important, we can come back again if we have to but there's only so much we can take."

Wilbur dragged up a rubbish bag, holding it out. "Put any clothes in there, we can wash them back at the house, it'll be alright."

Tommy nodded, wiping his eyes and taking it, starting to stuff things in. They spent a little while sorting through things, anything that was salvageable went into bags and a few suitcases Tommy found under the stairs, anything that wasn't was just left.

He picked up a laptop that had been underneath the roof, turning it over. It was broken beyond repair, the screen torn away from the keyboard, hanging on by a wire, the glass shattered.

"Hard drive is safe, there's a chance you can grab some things off it." Wilbur said as he passed by. "Worth a try. Can you help me with this." He held up a large suitcase. Tommy complied, grabbing the other end

"Aw, poor Wilbur, can't even manage one suitcase." Tommy taunted.

"I'll push you down the stairs." He gave the case a bit of a nudge, but Tommy just stuck his tongue out, unbothered.

"You wouldn't." They brought it around to the back of the car. "One, two, three." They lifted it in, setting it down with a thud, and Tommy dusted his hands off. The smell of smoke clung to him still, covering everything, ash streaked up his arm. He felt slightly sick, the milkshake curdling in his stomach. "I'm gonna take a minute."

"Cool." Wilbur gave him a thumbs up, not looking up from his phone, reading something slowly. He frowned, and then set off back into the house with a sudden determination, but Tommy didn't really notice, staring at the house. It still hadn't sunk in, he was packing the essentials of his life away, things that hadn't left the house in years.

“Hey.” Ranboo appeared by his shoulder suddenly, dumping down a bag. Tommy jumped back, startled, looking around urgently.

“What the hell was that for. You could get seen.” Tommy hissed. “What were you thinking?”

“Oh I didn’t just teleport straight in, I was under the cover of the trees over there.”

“There are Enforcers everywhere, they won’t stop to ask for the hero license. You need to be more careful, especially now.”

Ranboo sobered a little. “You’re right. I’ve just gotten very used to using it recently I keep forgetting.” He set the bag down. “I brought the stuff you left at my house.”

The moment of worry melted away. “Oh. You didn’t have to do that.”

“Makes it easier.” He glanced down at the box Tommy was holding. “Archangel comics? I mean, I knew you were a fan but really?” He teased. “I thought most of the Archangel stuff was destroyed after he died.”

“Mum had these in an attic for years, they probably missed them.” He looked at them for a bit. “I tried to find more but there isn’t much left.”

“You could ask Puffy.” Ranboo dropped his voice. “If you wanted to know more.”

“Puffy?”

“She was his apprentice right?”

“She was?” Tommy looked down at the comics. “I don’t remember that.”

“Can’t believe I knew something the fan boy didn’t.” Ranboo crowed, earning himself a hefty punch on the arm for his efforts.

“They don’t go up to his death okay!”

Ranboo looked as if he was about to say something else, but stopped abruptly, raising his voice. “Oh hi!” He gave Wilbur an awkward wave as he stepped out of the door. “Anyway, here’s your things.” He set the bag down. “I gotta go. I was going to say see you later, but I don’t know if we’re working tonight.”

“Why not?” He dragged a bag of clothes into the car, pushing one of the back seats down to make more space.

“There’s a city-wide curfew in place after 9, it got announced after all the looting, no one is allowed out. It’s shoot on sight so the Warden probably isn’t going to take the risk, even if we’re there to help.”

The breath rushed out of Tommy’s lungs. “You’re joking.”

“Wish I was.” He sighed. “And on that note, I’ll see you around.” He turned away, walking up the street and Tommy watched him go.

“Ready to leave?” Wilbur stood behind him, a pile of folders in his arms that he must have taken from the office. The one on the top was sealed, held closed with a small lock, and he might not have paid it any attention if he hadn’t spotted his name scrawled down the side. “What have you got?”

Wilbur glanced down at the files. “Oh, just some things that looked important.” He held up the folders. “Files and shit.”

“Where did you get that.” Tommy stared at the file. “I’ve never seen it before?”

“I mean it has your name on.” He dumped it in the car. “Ask Kristin when she wakes up I guess.” He slammed the boot shut, wriggling it to make sure, waving Tommy in, trying to get out before the Enforcers bothered them again

Tommy stared out of the window, going through a few leftover cold fries without really tasting them at all, the image of the burned-out houses marked in his head, along with a strange feeling of guilt. He’d watched it burn, and left, he could have done something.

“Are you sure you’re alright?” Wilbur said finally. “You’re unusually quiet.”

“Fuck off dickhead, I’m fine. Stop treating me like I’m fragile or something.”

“No, it’s not that.” Wilbur waved it aside. “I just want to…”

“Aw, he’s trying to be nice to me.”

“Tommy please.” He tried again, pained. “Look, we kind of got off on the wrong foot and all, well I think it was the right foot, anyone who can’t stand a bit of friendly bullying…”

“This is a bad start.” Tommy cut in.

“It’s a great start, shut up child. But just hear me out, I know you probably don’t like all this, it must be rough but if it was me, if it was Techno or dad in the hospital I’d be freaking out right now, so just let me help, okay?”

“Would you listen if I said no?”

“Are you saying no because you don’t need it or because you don’t know how to accept help or admit you need it?”

Tommy didn’t reply for a bit. “Fuck you.”

“That’s what I thought.” He threw the aux cable back. “Look, if something really bothers you just say, and when Kristin wakes up we can talk over what’s next, it’s not permanent or anything.”

“Fine. I guess you’re not so bad.” He said finally. Wilbur laughed, pushing his glasses up.

“Now say that like it didn’t cause you physical pain.”

“No.” Wilbur laughed, a bright, warm laugh, and Tommy began to smile as well, though he quickly covered it with a scowl when it was noticed, turning back to his playlist.

“Here we are.” Wilbur said finally. He turned into a gate and it slid shut automatically behind them, pulling up on a small gravel parking area outside a large, modern-looking house surrounded by a neatly mowed lawn. “Home sweet home.”

“Wow.” Tommy hopped out, staring around slowly. Most of the houses on the street were fenced off, all with large gardens, some with expensive cars visible through the front gate, everything perfectly clean and trimmed. “District two huh. So, you’re like rich rich.”

“Well, Dad is.” Wilbur walked around the car, opening the boot, keys jingling in his hand. “I’m just a part-time photographer and Tech’s employed by the uni sometimes to write papers but we don’t really do much. Help Dad out at work sometimes, that’s about it.”

“Photographer?” Tommy leaned in, intrigued. “Why photography?”

“Flexible. Not much of a fan of desk jobs or being bossed around. Can’t imagine how you do it.”

“Huh?”

“You’re an intern at the Agency right? That’s what Kristin told Phil anyway.” Wilbur’s voice floated out of the back, hidden behind the bags.

“Yeah.” Tommy managed. “Yeah, program for early school leavers.” The lie was much harder than usual, he hadn’t had to use it in a while. He grabbed a bag of clothes in one hand and a suitcase in the other, trying to cover up his stumble as quickly as possible. “Do we need to bring the things in?”

Wilbur waved his hand lazily. “We can do that when Techno’s back.”

Tommy dragged his bags out of the door. “Where is he? I thought he was here.”

“Out getting stuff for your room.”

“You don’t need to buy things.” Tommy protested again, but it fell on deaf ears, Wilbur already making his way

“It’s a spare room, it’s pretty empty, and with your house in the state it was you might be here for a while so we might as well make it cosy.”

It was all very cosy, big comfortable couches and carpets, a real wood burner in the corner, ready to be lit, not much of a colour scheme but nice, a large TV on the other wall. The kitchen was similar, an old stove in the corner, a bit messy, plates stacked up in the dishwasher but warm. It was oddly homely for the size of it. Wilbur raised an eyebrow, giving it a once over. “Techno must have cleaned. It’s never this neat.”

“Where’s your room?” Tommy queried,

“Just up the stairs.” He grabbed a bag, dragging it up, bashing it against every step loudly. “I sure hope there’s nothing delicate in there.” Tommy laughed, proceeding to do exactly the same, throwing it down at the top. “Techno’s at the end of the corridor, he likes his peace and quiet, Dad’s got the big room on the other side, bathroom is next to his, your rooms going to be at the other end.” He pointed at a plain door. “We’ve been using it as storage for a bit so a lot needs to be cleared out, so you’ll have to sleep in mine tonight, I have a camp bed.”

Wilbur's room was pretty tidy, all things considered, duvet scrunched up on the bed, a few things scattered over the floor, small pencil sketches and that sort of thing but it was a kind of organised chaos. His walls held an assortment of maps as well as what looked like photos, he probably took himself, nothing framed, just haphazardly tacked in place.

His desk was a mess though, computer flicking through a screensaver of family photos, covered with pens and paper and generally anything he didn't have a place for. There were a few books on his shelves, interspaced here and there with a mix of odd objects, an old camera, an unopened drinks can, an odd porcelain dog, and more bits and pieces that looked as if he'd just seen them in an antiques shop and taken a liking, as well as a large, familiar leatherbound book in pride of place on the top shelf.

Wilbur dragged a camp bed out, setting it on the floor. "You can put your stuff over here for now, I'll take the clothes down in a minute so we can wash them."

"Isn't that the..." Tommy pointed up at the shelf.

"Atlas?" He broke into a sudden smile. "Oh yeah, it was your idea, wasn't it?" He reached up, pulling the book down, starting to flick through, seemingly unaware he'd lost his audience of one. "It has some beautiful satellite pictures of the mountains, you can almost... what is it?"

Tommy stared at the shelf. "Is that a gun?"

Wilbur's expression froze, eyes darting between him, and the weapon the moved book revealed. He reached up, taking a small pistol down. It was made of dark metal, polished to a shine, the handle made out of some kind of old oak wood, carved with a pale outline of a willow tree. "It's unloaded, don't worry, I would never have a loaded gun in the house."

"You like guns?" Tommy asked, surprised. "You don't seem like you would."

A humourless smile crossed Wilbur's expression. "I've had some experience with them, I wouldn't say I like them, it's a weapon. There isn't really a non-destructive way a gun can be used, they're terrible things."

"Then why do you have one?"

He shrugged, indifferent. "It was a present, a while ago. I just kept it in case."

"In case of what?"

"I don't know, in case someone wants to hurt my family."

"But why would anyone want to do that?" He turned it over, running his finger across the cold metal, feeling a little uncomfortable.

"I don't know, we have money, and other reasons but I'm not getting into those."

Tommy stared at the gun, an odd feeling in his gut, butterflies rising in his chest. He'd seen guns before, they were normal even, and far worse and more powerful were carried around on a daily basis by Enforcers but somehow this was different. "You couldn't...actually kill them, could you?"

Wilbur hesitated, something odd in his expression. "If it was a question of them, or anyone I cared about, I wouldn't hesitate." Tommy recoiled a little.

"Not like that. You know, if someone threatened Kristin, you'd do anything to protect her." He got an immediate nod in response. "It's like that. I wouldn't want to. It would probably utterly destroy me, and the guilt would follow me around for years, but for my family I'd do anything." He set it down on the shelf, locking it away this time, ruffling Tommy's hair. "So as long as you don't plan to murder me in my sleep, you'll be fine."

"Oh fuck off." The moment broke, Tommy leaning away from Wilbur as the older boy lunged after him with a grin on his face. He stood up, stretching, making one last reach for Tommy, the younger dodging out of his way. "Serious talk over, it's snack time."

"We literally just ate."

"Don't care, snack time." He snatched his phone up from the bed, heading towards the kitchen, stopping abruptly in the doorway. "Tommy?"

"What?"

"Just got a text from dad. Kristin's awake."

Chapter End Notes

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Look, I'm nice, I keep my promises. Y'all need to have more faith in me, can't imagine what would have made you think I'd kill off one of Tommy's comfort figures XD

Also I don't normally do this, it feels very odd to ask but if you like this fic and want to post it anywhere, recommend it to anyone I would really appreciate it, because we're actually kind of close to hitting 10k which is just insane considering I never expected anyone to see this at all, thank you so much.

You've begun to feel like home

Chapter Notes

Title is from Look after You by the Fray.

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

This hospital was much quieter, crisp and brand new, all white and neon lights. Wilbur didn't even go to the reception, raising a hand in greeting to the receptionist, who was deep in conversation with a blonde-haired figure under a hood. The figure gave him a quick nod in return, hands pulled into a knitted sweater.

He strode straight past, pulling a card out of his pocket, scanning it against a door. It went green, sliding open, and Tommy picked up his pace to keep up.

"Where did you get that?"

"Dad helps fund the hospital, so we have access cards." He said casually. Tommy rolled his eyes

"You really put my mum in your hospital."

"It's not ours. Dad just helps fund it. Because of... reasons."

Tommy levelled a suspicious look at him. "What's that supposed to mean?"

He waved his hand airily. "Nothing much. Come on, Dad gave me the room number." He set off again confidently, leading him upstairs. They passed through several doors, Wilbur having to scan his card at each. Tommy looked around. "There's a lot of security."

"Rich people." Wilbur said, by way of explanation. "They're paranoid. Here we are."

The room was larger, all neat and tidy, comfortable chairs and even a TV in the corner, but Tommy barely gave it a passing glance. Kristin's eyes were open, leaning against a stack of cushions, not quite fully alert but there.

Phil was sat next to her, the two of them obviously caught in some kind of conversation, both smiling, barely noticing the door opening. Wilbur leaned against the door, coughing dramatically, and they both jumped. "Your attention please. I have a delivery addressed to one Kristin Walters, consisting of... A nuisance."

Tommy ignored him, running past. He was about to throw himself at her but stopped short with inches to spare so he didn't hurt her, sitting down, pulling her into a tight hug.

"Hey." She was very quiet, her voice hoarse.

“Fuck you.” He mumbled into her shoulder, tears streaking down his cheeks. “You scared me.” Her arm came up, wrapping around him, pulling him over.

“I’m sorry.”

“Starting to go on about shit like telling me you loved me.”

“I didn’t know what was going to happen. I needed you to know.”

“I know, I know.” He sunk down next to her, wiping his eyes

“I’ll get the bad news out of the way with, your house isn’t liveable right now.” Wilbur stuffed his hands in his pockets, hanging in the doorway awkwardly

“How did it go?” Phil asked, concerned

Tommy pulled a face. “Rubbish.” He squeezed Kristin’s hand. “I’m sorry.”

“It’s alright, I wasn’t expecting anything once I heard the fire was out of control.” She squeezed it back. “Of all the nights for you to be at a sleepover.” Her tone was light, but it had the slight warning behind it. He was just Tommy, who’d stayed with a friend all night, he knew nothing of what happened on that plaza.

“We lost a lot of things.” He said, opting to change the subject. “Water fucked everything up.”

“I have the memories.” Her breathing was very shallow, she had to keep pausing, but she was there and for the moment that was all he could care about. “We can buy more books and tables and shelves, I can’t get another Tommy. All that matters is you’re safe.” Wilbur made a retching noise, pulling a comically dramatic face.

“Don’t you make fun of people being sappy Wilbur Watson.” Phil said sternly. “I’ve seen you cry over the silliest things.”

Will’s expression immediately switched, forehead scrunching up in dismay. “No, Dad you don’t understand, they got married! And they were dancing and it was so sweet.”

“Annnnd no one cares.” Techno pushed past, setting a basket down. “I bought some more blankets Ms Walters.”

“Please, call me Kristin.” She said tiredly. “Ms Walters is a mouthful.”

“Of course, Ms Walters.” He replied, blank faced, holding back the tiniest of smiles. She smiled faintly

“He’s the only one with manners around here.”

“You can’t say he’s the one with manners when he was just so rude to me!” Wilbur cried out in protest, flinging his arms out dramatically but he was completely ignored, Kristin smiling at something Phil said to her. She was already growing quieter again, looking exhausted even by the simplest of conversations. Tommy’s eyes filled with tears.

“It’s alright sunflower.” She reassured him gently. “Don’t worry about me.”

“Why do you call him that?” Wilbur asked curiously. “Why not sunshine or something, I think sunshine is much better.”

She just smiled, tucking a loose strand of hair behind Tommy’s ear. “Oh say hi to Ranboo if you see him.”

Tommy rolled his eyes. “You’re going to adopt him at this rate I swear.”

Her eyes crinkled up in a teasing smile. “Would that be such a bad thing?”

“Of course it would!”

She let out a soft laugh. “Why not?”

“I’d get jealous that’s why.” He folded his arms stubbornly. “I’d get like those birds, the ones that throw them other ones out of the nest.”

“Cuckoo’s.” Wilbur supplied from the other side of the room. “They lay eggs in other bird’s nests and then the chick throws all the eggs out so they get all of the parent’s attention.”

“Nerd.”

“How are you settling in?” She asked. “Phil said you’re staying at his.”

“Didn’t really get much time to settle.” Wilbur stretched his legs out. “Tech are you nearly done with the room?”

“Yeah, got a car full of things.” Tommy’s eyes widened in alarm

“We’ve been meaning to turn it into a guest room for a long time, we just never have guests so this is just an excuse for that.” Phil intervened quickly. “Nothing you have to worry about.”

“That’s very kind of you.” Kristin said. “You didn’t have to do all that.” She nudged him pointedly. “Tommy?”

“Thank you.” He muttered, staring at the floor.

“I’m sorry about my son.” She said, a little reproachfully. “He does mean it. I know you have a problem with Will but...”

“I don’t have any problem with him.” Tommy argued

“It was at this moment, Wilbur decided to become a problem.” A voice intoned from the other side of the room, Wilbur getting to his feet. His gaze didn’t shift, zeroed in on Tommy.

“Uh.” Tommy backed away slowly, waving his hands. He was suddenly pinned to the carpet, Wilbur wrestling him down cheerfully. Tommy was hesitant at first, and then retaliated with full force, lunging for his arm. “Bitch!”

“Child.” Wilbur crowed gleefully.

They rolled back and forth across the floor, no particular aim, Tommy giving as good as he got. It was stupid, and childish, and fun, a release of the tension that had been crushing him since the night of the attack. It was like Wilbur knew he needed an outlet, the other only putting in as much effort as it took for Tommy to fight back.

“Boys! Kristin is trying to sleep.” Phil said finally.

They froze mid battle, Wilbur’s arm wrapped around Tommy’s neck, the younger doubled over, trying to escape the headlock, lunging for a pillow. Techno had removed himself from the battlefield, sitting on the window ledge, barricaded in with a chair for safety. Phil surveyed the scene in front of him, a tight smile tugging at his mouth. “You’re making a mess.”

“Am not. I was defending myself.” Wilbur replied, straight faced.

“How dare you! You attacked me first bitch.” Tommy renewed his escape attempts but Wilbur held steady, surprisingly strong despite his light built, dragging him around the table.

He winced suddenly, a flash of pain striking across his stomach as Wilbur dragged him back around. “Let go, let go!”

Wilbur leapt off like he’d stung. “Are you alright?”

Tommy nodded, pressing his hand to his stomach. “Stupid old thing. Just hasn’t properly healed yet, I’ll be fine.”

“What did you do?”

Tommy didn’t answer, not knowing how to respond. He straightened up, levelling an accusing finger at the older boy. “I’ll get you next time.”

“I hope I’m not interrupting anything.” A soft voice said. A doctor stood by the door, smiling slightly, clipboard in her hand. Tommy spun around, talking a half step forward, his mouth already open to ask a question.

“This is Tommy.” Phil introduced him quickly. “Kristin’s son.”

“Oh.” She gave him a nod. “I spoke to your dad earlier...”

“He’s not my dad.” Tommy said automatically. The doctor blinked, and then shrugged.

“Alright, well.”

“It’s fine.” Phil waved his hand. “Could you tell him what you told me, he’s been worried.”

“Do you want the good news or the bad news first?” She asked honestly. “Because I’m afraid it’s a mixed bag.”

“Good news?”

“She’ll be alright.” She reassured him. “She’s over the worst, the surgery she had at St Mary’s wasn’t too complex and worked well so there’s nothing to worry about on that front.”

“And the bad news?” Tommy prompted.

She checked her clipboard. “As for the bad news she’ll have to be on bedrest for a few weeks and I’m afraid she will also need round the clock care for quite a while, even after she goes home, which she’ll be able to do in about a week or so, if, and this is a big if, if there are no further complications. Even then she mustn’t move too much or she risks undoing the surgery, can’t exert herself in any way and she’ll need to be on a special diet for a little bit.” Tommy slid onto a chair, processing that slowly.

“They’ll provide everything we need, they have a doctor who does home visits and everything, it’s a lot more support than St Mary’s would have been able to give.” Phil added. “So you won’t have to do anything alone.”

“It’s alright.” Tommy said quickly. “I can handle that.”

“We can help.” Phil offered

“No.” Tommy cut in. “I’m her son, I’ll work it out.”

Phil didn’t look convinced, but he chose not to argue, checking his watch. “We need to go, but we’ll talk about this more later.” He said firmly. “You’re not getting out of this one.”

“Now?”

“It’s getting late, I don’t want to be out anywhere around curfew just in case, and you’ve had a long day by the looks of things.”

“But I…” He glanced over at Kristin, but her eyes were closed. Her breathing had eased back into sleep at some point, she looked peaceful, not in any kind of pain, but still too pale. “I don’t want to leave.” His voice was plaintive, almost childlike, but he didn’t care, and no one said anything. Phil’s hand settled on his shoulder, an oddly reassuring weight.

“She’ll be alright.” Phil reassured him gently. “She’s safe here.” Tommy nodded unwillingly. He let himself be led out, the four of them splitting up, Techno and Will both driving their own cars back having all arrived separately. He ended up with Phil, the other two leaving too quickly for him to go with them. He sat in a kind of awkward silence, not knowing what to say.

“There is the option of her staying longer at the hospital while we find a place for you two.” Phil told him suddenly as they waited at traffic lights. “But realistically I don’t think that would be fair on her.”

“I can do it.” Tommy protested. “It’s fine.”

“How would you take care of her.” He said, as kindly as he could. “I don’t mean this in any kind of cruel way, but Wilbur showed me photos of the house and it’s unliveable, and will stay that way for a long time.” He looked over, “Let me level with you, as someone who cares for her very much, she’s an old and dear friend of mine, I would do anything to make sure she’s safe, and alright. We’re on the same page here, so please, be honest with me, this is about Kristin first and foremost. Do you really

think you could care for her, because if you really do I'm more than willing to do everything I can to support that."

Tommy eyed him for a minute but he seemed truly genuine. He stared at his hands. "I." Phil nodded encouragingly, waiting for him to go on. "I don't know if my work will let me off, even to look after her." He admitted finally, hating every word that came out of his mouth. "I don't know."

"Surely they will." He said disbelievingly. "Of all things?" He shook his head. Phil was silent for a moment, concentrating on the road.

"Like I said, she'll be safe with us." He promised finally. "We don't have to make any final decisions yet, but I have more and more free time these days, I'd be more than happy to care for her until she's up on her own two feet, and we have plenty of room for you, the boys would be very happy to have you around more."

"I don't know if..."

"It's not ideal, I know. We haven't really gotten to know each other but for now it's what we have, and if you're willing to work with me, I can help you."

"I don't need help." He said defensively. "Not from you."

"If you won't accept help for yourself, then at least for her sake, the last thing she needs right now is to worry about you. And she will worry, you know that."

He was right, as little as Tommy liked to admit it, she would worry. "Low blow." He said, instead of giving a direct answer. Phil just sighed.

"I'm not trying to win anything here Tommy. You know I'm right, that's all."

He was saved from any further awkward conversation as they drew to a halt outside, hopping out as quickly as possible. Phil locked the car, pushing the front door open for him. "We're back!"

"You drive like an old man!" Wilbur called back. "We've been back for ages."

"I drive carefully." Phil retorted, taking his coat off and hanging it on the rack. Wilbur's was left tossed on the floor, and he picked it up patiently. "Will. For the last time, stop leaving your things everywhere."

"But Techno just tidied." He whined, sticking his head around the door. "It looks all wrong, I'm decorating."

There was a long-suffering sigh from the kitchen, clashing pans and warm aromas starting to drift down into the hallway. Tommy stood around aimlessly in the corridor, not really knowing what to do with himself. He found himself walking to the door of the kitchen, watching Techno work. "What are you doing?" Techno didn't look up, focused on what he was doing.

"Do you want a hand?" Tommy asked awkwardly. "I just don't have anything to do."

Techno's face slowly lit up into a smile. "Please, come round more often." He said warmly. "No one ever offers to help me."

"That's not true, I offer to help a lot." Phil came in behind him, filling the kettle up.

"But you do it wrong." Techno grumbled. "And we can't let Will anywhere near the stove, I'm not having the parsnip incident again."

Tommy began to grin. "The parsnip incident?"

"Oh, let me tell you." Techno sat down on a stool with a flourish. "Well..."

"Tea or coffee or anything Tommy?" Phil interrupted, before it was too late for him to get a word in.

"Uh. I'm alright thanks. What do you want me to help with?"

Techno pushed a knife over to Tommy. "Cut these up, I'll peel as I'm probably faster, the rest is pretty much done."

They settled into an easy rhythm, Techno peeling potatoes, passing them to Tommy, who'd chop them, tossing them into the pan.

"You're good at this." Techno glanced up. "We'll be done fast at this rate."

"I help mum sometimes. Can't really cook but I can chop shit just fine."

"I'll remember that." They fell into silence, just the hum of the stove and the bubbling of the pans, some distant chatter from the TV. It smelled really good, and it felt warm, and busy, as much as he loved home it had felt empty sometimes with just the two of them.

"Will's sure taken a shine to you." Techno noted after a little bit

Tommy glanced up. "He's just being annoying."

"You'd know if he was just annoying for the sake of it. He likes you." Techno said, with a flat certainty. "He likes to come off a certain way to people, but he's soft, really." Tommy just nodded, not knowing how to respond to that. "Be gentle with him." He pushed the last potato over to him, meeting Tommy's eyes. "He doesn't open up easily, I wouldn't want anything to happen to him."

"Are... Are you suggesting I..."

"I'm not suggesting anything. But he's my brother, call me overprotective but if anything happened to him, I don't know what I'd do." There was a slight warning laced with the last part like he knew perfectly well what he'd do, and it wouldn't be pretty.

Something knotted in Tommy's chest, painful and uncomfortable, a lump in his throat. There was a patience, and a kind of care in the normally reserved man's eyes, a kind of fierce protectiveness that Tommy wanted, a sudden longing striking him for something he'd never had, never thought he'd needed. He brushed it aside as quickly as it came, dismissing it as ridiculous, but the feeling lingered

"Man, I want a brother that would offer to beat up anyone who annoyed me. I'd start placing bets." He joked, trying to make light of it. Techno lingered for another moment, then, deciding his message

had been sent, smiled tightly.

“You seem like the kind of person to bet against them every time, and keep losing.” He said wryly

“Now what’s that supposed to mean!”

Techno just chuckled, getting to his feet. “That’s all, thanks for the help. Go sit with Will, he’ll enjoy the company.” He complied, trotting into the living room. He settled down on the sofa, watching the TV blankly.

Will held out an arm somewhat absentmindedly, and Tommy leaned against him without thinking, sleepy, half paying attention as they switched through channels. The clock on the wall struck nine, and Phil went out for a moment to lock the front door, Wilbur casting an uneasy glance out of the window.

“In an effort to improve transparency the Agency released proof that they played no part in the coverup of Lethe and Thanatos’s existence, prompting the administration to release a statement this morning addressing the rumours they kept vital information from the public.....”

He sat forward, intrigued. “Huh.”

“Interesting move.” Phil said dismissively, head down in a newspaper. “Won’t do jackshit for them, but you know.”

“The information on the terrorist known as “Lethe” was kept from the public as a matter of national security. His actions fall outside of the citizen sphere and as it stands he poses no direct threat to the city or nation at large. The decision of the agency to release this information comes at a direct contradiction...”

Phil leaned over, switching it over to a nature program. “Stop listening to that depressing shit Will.”

“I was watching that!” He complained.

“I mean it’s not anything new. It’s a back ‘n forth innit.” Tommy stretched his arms out, yawning. “They say something, the Warden releases something to say they know what they’re doing, they try and bring down the Agency, it’s just how it always is.”

Phil nodded slowly. “You’re not wrong.”

A weight settled on his lap, and he looked up to Techno balancing a tray of food, giving a knowing look to the two of them as he set it down. Tommy scowled right back, but didn’t get as far as saying anything, wriggling out from under Wilbur’s arm slightly to sit up, scrabbling for a knife and fork.

It was good, really good, Techno was a skilled cook, as surprising as it was, crisp potatoes and meat that fell off the bone. He was almost too tired to see quite what he was eating but it tasted good, and warmed him up from the inside, only making him sleepier.

Will took the tray for him, and he protested slightly, trying to get up and help. Phil held it just out of his reach, shaking his head. “You’re a guest, you don’t have to help with all that.”

“He means he’s going to shove it in the dishwasher and forget about it and don’t want anyone to see.” Phil informed him.

Will rolled his eyes. “I take no shame in leaving my things everywhere, I have nothing to hide.”

“We know.” Techno intoned, bored, leafing through a book in the corner.

Will came back holding a blanket, pulling it around his shoulders. “You tired?” Tommy shook his head sleepily, making Wilbur smile fondly.

“Sure.” He reached out, pulling the blanket over both of them. Tommy sunk down automatically, and Will put a protective arm over him. He dozed off, perfectly full and enveloped in warmth, Wilbur’s oddly comforting presence next to him, feeling safer than he had in a long time.

Chapter End Notes

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Look, see, I'm a fluff writer, I can do it. I only had one death threat in the whole thing

Anyway, in honour of the twinsduo meetup we have plenty of Techno and Will content.

Pancakes and Mild Criminal Activity

Chapter Summary

“My brother was in a hideout with a friend back at the first raids.” Spark said quietly. “He never talks about him anymore. Sarnap signed up to the Agency when they got caught, his friend didn’t.”

“He’s dead?”

“Worse.”

A cold chill ran down Tommy’s spine. “Pandora.”

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Tommy trudged down the stairs, wrapped in a blanket, a little disorientated, following the sound of frying oil to the kitchen. Voices were playing over a radio, overlaid with soft classical music, water rushing into the sink as he pushed the door open.

“Good morning.” Techno looked up, stood over the stove in a comfortable hoodie, hair pulled back in a quick braid. “Pancakes?” He got a sleepy nod in response. “Maple syrup, chocolate chips, banana and chocolate spread?” He pulled the fridge open, “Strawberries and chocolate spread? Most things and chocolate spread?”

A half smile pulled at Tommy’s face. “Yes please.”

“To which one?”

“All of them. On the same one.”

“You are a terrible human being.” Techno told him, deadpan. “I’ll see what I can do.” He started to dig through the cupboards, and Tommy found himself a seat at one of the stools of the kitchen island.

“You look tired.” Tommy nodded slowly, dragging a hand over his eyes.

“Wilbur snores.”

“I do not!” A distant voice yelled down the stairs, and was promptly unanimously ignored.

“Don’t worry, we’re sorting out your room today.” Techno dug through the cupboards, handing him a glass of water. “I already started moving boxes down.”

“Where’s Phil?”

“He leaves for work early.” Wilbur came in, tugging a sweater on. “They’ve got him working overtime on that City Hall project.” The brothers shared a look, some kind of inside joke passing

between them, before Wilbur shoved past him, trying to snatch a finished pancake off the plate next to the stove, getting his hand smacked away for his efforts. "Oi!"

"I'm making Tommy's first, shove off."

"Favouritism." Wilbur argued, snatching the mug his brother had ready for tea, taking the boiled kettle and using it for himself, something the other seemed very used to, calmly getting another cup out of the cupboard and setting it down.

"He was here first, he's a guest, and he said please." Wilbur began to bicker with him but it was very one sided, though that seemed a normal thing, like arguing with a rock, nothing could get under Techno's skin and Will wasn't really trying too hard.

"There you go." He set a plate down stacked high with pancakes in front of Tommy, startling him out of a daze. "Chocolate chip pancakes with chocolate spread, banana and strawberries and golden syrup. Enjoy."

Tommy's eyes lit up, snatching up a fork, humming appreciatively as he began to shovel it down, Will watching on critically, sipping at a mug of strong coffee. "He's going to be sick."

"F*ck you 'itch." He managed through a mouthful of food, waving his fork threateningly in his general direction.

No sooner had his plate hit the sink than bony fingers wrapped around his wrist, Wilbur dragging him out of the kitchen, ignoring his very loud complaints as he tugged him down to the garage. Techno hadn't been joking when he said he had a car full of things.

Wilbur had apparently handed him a very detailed shopping list, shelves, a desk, folders, pencils, paper, a bedside lamp, even a flat pack bed that Will somehow nearly managed to screw to the wall, at which point he'd had the screwdriver confiscated from him and had been sent to do laundry while Techno and Tommy worked on it, hunched over the instructions, the younger handing the elder the pieces as he called for them.

It took longer than they were expecting, most of the day in the end, but bit by bit the echo of the empty room faded, slowly filling up. Techno had given him his old pc, and a keyboard to go with it, setting it up on a desk in the corner, Wilbur had lent him a map he wasn't using to take up some wall space, the floor covered in soft carpet, all of the storage boxes had been moved down into the garage.

Any of the photos and bits and pieces they'd been able to salvage from his house had been set up on the shelves. It wasn't his room at home, far from it, and it still felt a little empty, still like a guest room, but it was something.

He sat on the floor, folding all the freshly washed clothes Wilbur had bought up, laying them out in a drawer under his bed. Pizza boxes lay discarded from dinner, none of them could be bothered to cook, sort of shifted towards the trash can but no one had put them in yet. There was a knock on the door, and he glanced up.

"Mind if I come in?" Phil stood in the doorway, leaning to one side on a cane. He must have just come back from work, still wearing an emerald green suit and tie, looking exhausted

“Sure.” He pulled his headphones out, shoving his phone in his pocket. “May I?” Tommy nodded, shoving his things aside, and Phil limped over, sitting down on the end of his bed.

“They did a good job.” He said critically. “I think Wilbur said he wanted to paint but seeing as you’re very set on not staying that probably won’t be necessary.” He leaned back. “How was your day?”

He shrugged. “It was fine. Techno makes good pancakes.”

“That he does.” Phil agreed.

“Is that a walking stick?” He asked finally, curious. “I never saw it before.” Phil glanced down, as if only just noticing what he was holding.

“I think you’re right.” He mimed shock, staring at it. “Where the fuck did that come from?”

Tommy cackled. “Old man.” That drew a weary smile. He held it out for Tommy to examine and it was almost snatched it of his hands. It was beautifully made, carved out of some kind of dark hardwood polished to a shine, the head a weighted crow’s skull shaped out of solid, polished with use, the beak sharpened to a point. He turned it over, fascinated

“Got an injury a long time ago.” He explained. “Some days it acts up, this is one of those days.”

“Where did you get this?” He admired it, feeling the weight, spinning it around once experimentally before handing it back. Phil took it, leaning on it slightly.

“A friend made it for me. It was a gift.”

“Good for whacking people over the head with.” He said wisely. He struck Tommy as someone who smiled very easily, crow’s feet deepening around his eyes. He warmed a little to him without even meaning to, he had an oddly comforting presence, and even in the silences it didn’t feel as awkward, like Phil was just enjoying his company, listening keenly to anything he had to say.

“Have you got everything you need?”

“Yes.” Tommy paused, staring at the floor for a moment. “Thank you. You didn’t have to do all this.”

“Like I said, we don’t get guests often so they made the most of it.” He did one final scan of the room, giving a satisfied nod. “If you need or want anything else the boys will be happy for an excuse to get out the house.”

An odd, distant wailing interrupted them, echoing down the streets. Tommy felt shivers run up his spine. Phil looked up, shaking his head. “That was oddly ironic.”

“What was that.”

“Curfew sirens. They announced them earlier, so people have no excuse for not being inside.” His expression grew heavier. “It’s just an excuse for the Enforcers to validate any...incidents.”

“You don’t think much of them do you.”

“Who does.” He rose to his feet. “Anyway, I just wanted to make sure you’d settled in alright.” He leaned a little heavier on the cane. “I should probably go lie down before I just fall flat on my face in the corridor or something, Wilbur would never let me live it down if I did.” He said wryly.

“I wouldn’t either.” Tommy told him happily. “Just so you know.”

“Oh god, now there’s two of you fuckers.” He said without any kind of venom, his voice fond. Tommy decided to think that tone was aimed only at his son. He headed over to the door, shutting it quietly behind him, Tommy watching him go, carrying on with what he was doing, a little reassured somehow.

He finished folding everything, pushing it all under his bed, settling down to a show he hadn’t finished, darkness having long fallen outside. His window overlooked the back garden, the lights downstairs cast across the grass, shapes moving back and forth. He entertained the idea of joining them for a minute, and then decided against it, too pull

A sudden knocking sound startled him out of his thoughts, and he looked around blindly. It came again, from the window, and he spun around to see Spark of all people perched outside, out of hero uniform, grinning. Tommy sat up, eyes wide, running over to the window and pulling it open. “What the hell?”

“Hi.”

“How did you find me?” He stood aside, letting him in. “What the fuck is this?”

“Void told us.” Spark dusted himself off.

“Us? How did Void know where I was?”

Spark shrugged. “Person you’re living with gave him the address or something he said.”

“Oh, yeah.” He shook his head. “It’s literally a shoot on sight curfew are you mad? You shouldn’t be out.”

Spark grinned. “A little. Purpled says he knows a safe spot we can go talk, you coming with?”

“Purpled’s in on this too?”

“Of course he is. Even Void’s in.”

“How did you talk him into this?”

“Dunno.” He stuffed his hands in his pockets. “You coming or not?”

Tommy glanced down at the shadows, mulling it over for a moment. “Fine.” Tommy gave in with a grumble, refusing to let himself outdone. He pulled on a dark hoodie, grabbing a plain black face mask, not his hero one, just one to cover his nose and mouth, hiding as much of his features as possible, just in case.

“Alright, let’s go.” Spark signalled out of the window. His vision flickered, and then they were both back on the ground again, hidden in the shadow of a house, Purpled standing with one hand in his pocket, the other holding a drink of some kind, Ranboo nearby, wearing his mask.

“How did they pull you into this?” Tommy asked him, baffled.

“Spark promised snacks.” Spark nodded enthusiastically, patting his pockets, a plastic bag crackling inside it. “And I guessed you’d probably do it either way so it’s safer with me teleporting than you trying to dodge Enforcers.”

“That’s fair, actually. Where are we going?” Spark pointed at Purpled.

“You know where the Offline TV tower is?” He asked. “The news station?” He nodded, holding out his hands, the others grabbing on. Tommy hesitated for a moment, a little uneasy.

“Having second thoughts?”

“Nah I’m good.” He grabbed onto Ranboo’s shoulder.

They reappeared far above the city, wind whipping across the exposed rooftop, streets laid out beneath their feet. The clouds seemed to be within touching distance, fleeting past in the night sky, lit up from below. The only way up was a long fire escape down the side of the building, they’d know if anyone was coming from miles off.

Tommy walked the teleport off with ease, more than used to it now but Spark was looking a little green, stumbling over to a large metal air vent. “Don’t feel too good, actually.”

“Hah. Couldn’t be me.”

Ranboo rolled his eyes. “You nearly threw up in a bush the first time.”

“You’re getting better at this.” Tommy said, changing the subject immediately. “Three people at once?”

“It’s getting stronger.” Ranboo stretched his arms out, watching the particles dance around his fingers. “I’ve been using it so often lately I’m getting better at harder jumps.”

“Cool.” Eryn said enthusiastically. His eyes lit up, running to the edge of the roof, throwing his arms out for balance, running along it. “We’re on top of the world.”

“Yeah we are.” Tommy hopped along the wall after him, bouncing from foot to foot.

“Careful, you could fall.” Ranboo called over, looking worried

“I’ll just fly.”

“You can’t fly.” Tommy deflated a little, throwing a middle finger at Spark.

“You held a roof together and you can’t fly?” Ranboo asked curiously. “Can’t you just, I don’t know, telekinesis yourself?”

“Okay but it wasn’t for long, and nearly completely knocked me out.” Tommy pointed out. “And I’m not really allowed to try, I tried once and it didn’t go so well, was out of training for a week with a sprained wrist.”

“Just say you’re scared of heights already.” Spark teased him. “How did you find this place?”

“Punz showed me it a while back.” The other boy called over his shoulder. “We can talk about anything up here.”

“We should be a bit careful.” Ranboo cautioned. “We don’t want anyone to see us.”

“There’s no one here to see us.” He spread his arms. “No cameras, no nothing, we made sure.”

“What are we doing here?”

“I mean I haven’t seen any of you since a wholeass terrorist attack,” Spark pointed out. “The meeting barely counts, that just told me you were alive, I didn’t get anything else.”

The mood sobered almost instantly, Tommy hopping down from the wall, sitting down against it.

“You know they’re trying to blame us for it. Said it was our fault it went off or something.”

Eryn rubbed his hand over his eyes. “We did everything we could but destroying fire is a lot harder than making it and both me and Sapnap aren’t very good at it. Tsunami was the best fire fighter we had.”

“Maybe if Purpled had...”

“Don’t fucking start. I got dragged to hell for being late.” Purpled rolled his eyes. “It’s not even like I could do shit, I’m a sharpshooter, that’s not what you want in an evacuation. You were lucky you got knocked out when you did.” He told Tommy. “I mean we didn’t have to deal with it much but casualties were pretty high.”

Tommy stared at the floor, not knowing what to say. A hand settled on his shoulder and he looked up to see Ranboo watching him, concerned. “You alright?”

“Fine.”

“You’re clearly not.”

“I’m just trying not to think about it.” He said abruptly. “I’m good.”

“Did you see the news? There was more missing.” Eryn added. “They don’t know how, but several people were snatched from their homes while that was going on, usual theme, hybrids or metas, disappeared without a trace.”

“They find them faster than the police.”

“And they kill them faster than the police.” Purpled quipped, drawing wry smiles. “Also didn’t you hear at the meeting?”

“Hear what?” Spark took a bag of sweets out of his pocket, handing them around. Purpled pulled a face.

“You all just left?”

“Well. Yeah.”

Purpled shrugged. “Sucks to be you. Anyway, I stayed and listened at the door. The meta research department was in one of the stations that got burned down.”

Ranboo blinked. “That’s a good thing, right?”

“Well, sort of. All of the data got stolen, files and shit, completely looted before anyone got there. Everyone inside was killed, execution-style, never even stood a chance.”

Complete silence fell. “I haven’t heard anything about that,” Tommy whispered

“I mean it hasn’t been long,” Ranboo said cautiously. “Maybe they just haven’t had time.”

Eryn shook his head. “That should have been in the news right away. That’s one hell of a cover-up, what the fuck.”

“They don’t want to admit it was worse than it is.” Eryn rested his head on his hand, staring off into the distance. “It’s perfect for them. Police force is wrecked, Enforcers get to move in and take their job like they’ve always wanted, of course they don’t do shit to find out who did it.”

“They don’t really need to, do they. It’s kind of obvious who did it.” Tommy pointed out. “The Syndicate’s right there.”

Purpled’s eyes darted to Tommy with a rare note of sympathy. “To be fair, haven’t even heard a word that the Commissioner got hurt, that feels like it should be on the news. Syndicate gunning down the highest rank in the police force.”

“It wasn’t the Syndicate,” Tommy said grimly.

“Huh?”

“It wasn’t the Syndicate who shot her, she got caught in the crossfire when the Enforcers tried to gun down Achilles.” Spark’s mouth formed into an o, nodding slowly.

“But was an accident, right?” He asked

“Yeah, why wouldn’t it be.”

“I mean come on man.” Purpled took a sip of his drink. “They fucking hate each other, how hard would it be for an Enforcer to just...slip.”

“They wouldn’t.” He protested. “I’m sure they wouldn’t, it’s too risky.”

“Would you bet on it?”

“No.” He admitted. “Probably not.”

Eryn snorted suddenly. “Speaking of Achilles, when is he going to get tired of that stupid sword dragging around everywhere?”

Ranboo and Tommy shared a look. “It’s stupid until he’s holding it to someone’s throat and threatening to start killing.”

Eryn smirked. “That’s a fucking L dude.”

“Yeah couldn’t be me.” Purpled kicked his legs up, leaning back against the wall. “Fucking casual, imagine getting kidnapped by the syndicate

Tommy grinned. “Yeah, me neither.”

Ranboo leaned his head on his hand. “I mean. You did kind of attack Orpheus and hold him at ransom back so…”

“You what!” Eryn’s head shot around. “You didn’t tell me that!”

“To be fair, this is the first time I’ve properly talked to you since it happened,” Tommy said quickly. “I haven’t really had time.”

“At least the other two weren’t there.” Spark said, “Cos apparently there’s two more, now. Nice of them to fucking tell us, we barely knew about Lethe and now there’s another one?”

“There’s a whole bunch of them.” Purpled corrected. “That isn’t news, or how would they keep snatching people, sure as hell isn’t Orpheus getting his hands dirty.”

“Yeah but leaders are a different story. They’re the ones who cause us problems.” He frowned. “Stupid ass names as well. I know what Lethe is cos the news won’t shut up about rivers and death but what’s Thanatos or whatever the fuck it is.”

“Thanatos. He’s the Greek god of death.” Ranboo told them, “I looked it up, cos Puffy had us searching through documents.”

“I thought that was Hades?” Tommy asked

“Common misconception.” Purpled leaned forward. “Hades is the god of the underworld, he governs the dead, keeps them in line, but Thanatos is the actual god of death. Kinda cool looking dude, wings and sword and shit.”

“How do you know that?”

Purpled shrugged. “Was thinking about Hades as a hero name. Cos you know, sharpshooter, death, all that.”

“Hades would have been a badass name, why the hell did you go for Purpled?” Tommy asked. “I’m a Greek hero, we could have matched.”

“Ones a god, ones a hero, it’s not quite a match. Also, I just liked Purpled.” He said, looking a little awkward. “Was a nickname Punz gave me, and no one really calls me anything else now.”

“Hold up. Puffy had you researching them? And you didn’t tell us anything?” Spark cut back in, offended

“To be fair, I don’t really know you two that well,” Ranboo said, not unkindly. “But yeah, me and Theseus both.”

Eryn narrowed their eyes. “You two know each other, don’t you? I’m not going to out him by using his real name, am I?” He waved his hand at Tommy

“I’ve never shown them my face.” Ranboo explained to Tommy, who was looking confused. “Or name. I mean that’s what we’re supposed to do.” He pointed out, amused. “Not like anyone at the tower does.”

“I mean Puffy and Ponk don’t really care as long as they’re inside the Agency, Jack can’t really hide, cos he’s half robot, Sapnap and me don’t have masks.” Eryn listed them off his fingers. “The only ones who really stick to is was Rose, but she’s gone, and the Warden, I have a vague recollection of seeing his face once but not recently.”

“He used to not wear it,” Ranboo said quietly. “I asked Puffy about it a while ago, he just stopped doing that, and now she never sees him with it off.”

“Easier to yell at people when they can’t judge you.” Purpled drawled. “Come on then, we all know who each other are.” Ranboo shifted, uncomfortable. “Meta code of honour, you never rat other people’s identities out.” He added. “You don’t need to worry.”

“Never heard that one,” Spark said curiously.

“I mean you grew up in a safe home, and you had your brother, so you probably didn’t have to worry about it.” He shrugged. “It’s not a rule exactly, it just makes sense. We’re all trying to survive out here.”

“It’s rough out there.” Ranboo agreed. “Barely got out of a couple of raids.”

Purpled sat up, startled. “Wait you’re a hideout kid?”

“Was. You were too?”

“Yeah, went through a couple, then my last one got raided and I was on my own for a bit.” He shrugged. “Then Punz found me. Nearly got thrown in one of the containment facilities cos they didn’t see how I’d be useful in the Agency but I was like 15 so he managed to talk them out of it.”

“My brother was in a hideout with a friend back at the first raids,” Spark said quietly. “He never talks about him anymore. Sapnap signed up to the Agency when they got caught, his friend didn’t.”

“He’s dead?”

“Worse.”

A cold chill ran down Tommy's spine. "Pandora." Just the word itself seemed to make the air drop a few degrees each time it was said. Purpled span a knife around his knuckles, brow furrowed

"Punz says they've had cells open for the Syndicate for over a year."

"They aren't just going to kill them?" Ranboo asked curiously

"Why would they?" He popped another piece of gum in, carrying on watching the knife. "Dead people become martyrs, if they're alive they can chuck them in Pandora until they break."

"They throw anyone in there." Ranboo agreed. "I mean there's innocent people in there, for sure. We all know that."

"Better dead than in Pandora." There were murmurs of agreement. "Always better dead than in Pandora."

"Except if it's however the hell Archangel died, cos that shit looked nasty." Purpled chimed in.

"One day we'll be deciding who goes in there." Eryn picked at his sleeve, uncomfortable.

"Oh, we won't." Purpled countered. "Everyone knows it's going to be Theseus."

"Huh?" Tommy looked up, everyone's eyes suddenly on him.

"Come on." Spark nudged him. "The Warden's made it clear since forever who's leading next."

Tommy shrugged awkwardly. "I don't think..."

"Everyone knows," Eryn said. "Tsunami sure as hell knew, that's why she kept you away from him, he's been trying to train you for years."

"I mean you gotta learn the essentials for Warden duty. Annoying the president, failing to protect kids, overworking kids, underpaying people and doing dodgy shit so our funding doesn't get cut again, all in the name of future meta freedom." Purpled rolled off, completely deadpan. "You're going to be a hero Theseus, you need to learn the basics."

"Oh my god! You have a face." Eryn exclaimed suddenly, completely derailing the conversation. Ranboo had taken his mask off at some point, watching them quietly. "A little warning please?"

"What's your name?" Purpled called over. "You didn't tell us."

"Ranboo." He said shortly.

"Ranboo? Weird name." He decided.

"Yeah, weird name."

"Your name is literally Eryn shut the fuck up." Purpled retorted

"Alright Purpled." He shot right back

The other boy grinned. "Fine. You can have that one."

"There, now we're all even. Anyway I..."

There were distant gunshots, and someone screamed. The blood drained out of Tommy's face, and he saw it echoed on the others. A car alarm went off from that direction, piercing and loud even all the way up at the top of the tower, echoing through the empty streets.

"Quiet." Purpled hissed. They all fell silent, Eryn switching his phone off, hiding the light.

"Uh oh." A helicopter was sweeping across the rooftops, heading for the gunshots, a spotlight sweeping underneath. Ranboo's eyes widened. "It's going to go right over us."

"We need to move, now." Purpled grabbed Eryn's wrist. "Voi...Ranboo, nah that's weird, Void. Drop us off at the park, we can both get home from there. Come back for Tommy, three people is a lot." Ranboo shot a look over his shoulder for Tommy's permission, and he nodded, not knowing what else to do.

"I'll only be a minute." He grabbed their hands and vanished, leaving Tommy alone on the rooftop. He pressed himself against the wall, ready to run if he needed to. It was only seconds in reality but it seemed to stretch out, heart pounding.

Purple particles gathered around him just as the spotlight swept towards the vent he hid behind. He staggered out into some kind of cold concrete chamber, footsteps echoing down a long tunnel.

"Storm drain. We should be safe down here." Ranboo told him, out of breath.

"Oh my god. They shot someone," Tommy whispered. "We probably just heard someone die."

Ranboo nodded grimly, eyes a little too wide. "That's what shoot on sight curfew means, I guess, but it didn't feel real."

"We were just talking." He said hollowly. "It was a joke."

"We couldn't have done anything Tommy." He said bluntly. "We couldn't save them, we can't change anything."

"Doesn't make it easier." He ran his hands through his hair slowly. "Fuck. That was close."

Ranboo pushed his hair out of his face, putting his mask back on. "I don't know, we should do that more often."

"What?" Tommy stared at him, stunned, and the other boy managed a weak smile

"Look at your face."

"Prick." But he couldn't stop a slight grin catching on. "You're fucking crazy."

"Maybe a little." He rested his hands on his knees, taking a deep breath.

“They couldn’t catch us.” Now that the danger had passed, he could see the light of it. “We’re unstoppable, no curfew for me bitch!” He hopped down the side, skidding into the bottom of the drain, debris clattering down in his wake, picking his way over the little trickle of water.

“They could notice. There aren’t many people who can teleport.” Ranboo said doubtfully.

“Eh, we’ll deal with it when it comes, if it comes. They’ll assume we escaped before they assumed we teleported.”

“True.” He yawned, stretching out his arms. “We should get you back before anyone realises you’re gone.”

“Eh. Do we have to?” He dragged his feet, slumping his shoulders, pulling a pitiful face. It had no effect on Ranboo, the elder being more than used to his antics.

“I mean, we can do this again, but I’ve been jumping a lot today, I’m kind of tired.” He admitted.

“And I don’t want to get too tired and accidentally port you into the wall or something.”

“Fine.” He accepted a hand to get himself back up, and the storm drain evaporated around them, the chill replaced by the comfortable warmth of his room. Ranboo looked a little worse for wear, shaking slightly, hands trembling.

“You alright?” Tommy asked, concerned

“I’ll be fine.” The reply came a little too quickly

“I mean, if you want to stay here for a bit, you can.” He offered. “I’m not sleeping after that.” His eyes landed on his laptop, and he snatched it up. “Movie?”

Ranboo gave in easily, looking relieved, and Tommy threw him a blanket and one side of the headphones. He made himself comfortable, leaning his head on Ranboo's arm, the walls a shield from anything else the city could throw at them.

Chapter End Notes

This whole interaction is entirely based on what happens when you get Gen Z in a call, they will inevitably talk about politics, at length, with a surprising amount of knowledge and media literacy on the topic

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Brothers and light arson

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

The city was virtually on lockdown. Monday came and went, with no sign of the tension lifting, but it didn't seem to come into the walls of the house. Instead of sitting in his room most of the day like he used to he'd be out talking to people, either one of the brothers, or Ranboo dropping by to watch movies or a call from Tubbo.

They visited the hospital most days, either Will or Techno or now and then, Phil ferrying him back and forth, the latter barely home, and almost always looking tired when he was, which Tommy gathered was not common, but not too unusual either. Kristin was steadily improving, though she still spent most of the day asleep.

He settled into the Watson home fast. As much as he tried to deny it he fitted right in, never in the way or out of place much, neatly filling a space he hadn't realised was there. Days passed in a blur of hospital visits, hiding in his room, or in the evenings parched on the edge of the sofa, out of the way of a wrestling match between Phil and Wilbur over mario kart or stood at Techno's elbow in the kitchen, or chasing Wilbur around the garden wielding Phil's cane as a sword, the old man himself watching from a chair on the patio, head thrown back in laughter.

Tommy trotted into the kitchen, stealing a cookie from the side, trotting over to see what Techno was working on, the elder hunched over the kitchen table and a pile of paper. "Projected.... for the Haven project." He tilted his head, trying to work out the other words but Techno snatched it away.

"Oi. You'll get crumbs over it."

"What you doing?"

"Just work stuff for Dad." He glanced up as Phil strode in, looking a little annoyed. "Speak of the devil. You're back early?"

"Tried to get out of the city to see a potential client, but they've closed the roads." He pulled his scarf off, hanging it over the hook.

"When did that happen?"

"This morning. Apparently they're looking for something, no idea what. It's fine, I was going to be home early anyway but I'd rather not have to deal with the wasted trip." Wilbur slipped over to Techno, looking over his shoulder.

"Why's that?"

"Kristin's coming home today." Phil grabbed a drink out of the fridge. "Did you forget?"

"Well, 'home'." Tommy said. He began to pace around the kitchen, spinning

"Aw come on." Techno teased him gently. "We're not that bad."

“We talked over this.” Phil said. “And you agreed this was how we were going to do things. I mean you can but with the amount of work the boys put into redoing two rooms they’d be very disappointed.”

“Yeah, that’s why we’d be disappointed.” Wilbur strolled in. “No other reason. Afternoon dad, did you forget the time?”

“Or maybe I just wanted to come home and see my sons.” Phil shot back. “Rather than hear more old jokes.”

“I mean. They’re at least one of your sons only sense of humour.” Techno gathered up the papers, slipping them back into a file.

“Uh, Techno?” Tommy looked over his shoulder and Techno tried to turn his head to look.

“Get off Will.” Wilbur grinned, resting his head on top of his brothers. “Shan’t.”

“Move.” His brother tried again, a little more snappishly. “Now.”

“I like it here.”

“You’re annoying me.”

“You made fun of my sense of humour.” His brother retorted. Phil patted him on the shoulder sympathetically. “It’s alright Tech. We can be short together.”

“Only for you.” Techno replied, a little irritable but mostly joking. Tommy resumed his pacing, treading around the kitchen island restlessly.

“Tommy that won’t help.” Wilbur said finally

“Don’t care, didn’t ask.”

“Is there anything else you can do?” Phil suggested. “Play a game, tidy your room?”

“It’s tidy. Don’t feel like games.”

“Laundry?”

“Done. Dishwasher filled...”

“Will told me he did that.” Techno cut in, one eyebrow raised. Wilbur smiled innocently.

“I helped.”

“You sat on the side and told me I was doing it wrong.” Tommy levelled an accusing finger at him. “That is not helping.”

“Football in the garden?”

“Not in the mood.” Wilbur narrowed his eyes thoughtfully.

“Go for a walk?” Tommy shrugged indifferently. “We can go get food? So long as no other roads are closed.” He glanced back at Phil, who shook his head.

“Looked fine on the way here. It’s just the ways out.”

“Sounds like a plan.” He snatched his car keys up from the side. “Come on.”

Tommy caved, turning and saluting the other two. “If I die to his driving, put something funny in my obituary.”

“I’ll come up with something.” Techno said pleasantly. “Tommy, professional child, or something like that.”

“You’re stealing Will’s jokes prick!”

“Oi! It was my joke first.” His voice faded into the distance as they headed down to the garage

“What’s the matter?” Wilbur asked as they pulled out of the street, looking concerned. “I mean, it’s not like she’s in danger or anything, or they wouldn’t let us bring her home.” He reasoned. “Even the doctor said it would be better, she’s miserable all day in that hospital room, so what’s bothering you so much?”

“I don’t know. It’s just change, it feels weird.” He shifted his feet uncomfortably. “It’s nothing personal.”

“What is it then?” He paused to flip off a rude motorcyclist.

“It’s just always been me, and her. Other people are weird.”

Wilbur’s expression morphed into understanding. “I get it. Me and Tech were like that as kids. It took us a long time to trust Phil because we were just so used to relying on each other. But she’ll be okay with us, I promise, and you’ll be involved in everything that happens.”

Tommy nodded. He stared at the dashboard for a little while, waiting until they turned into the drive through. “I’m paying.”

“Absolutely not.” Will cut him off. “I’m paying”

“I mean considering I’ve been botherin’ you for the past week it’s only fair.” He argued.

“It’s nice having you around.” Wilbur disagreed immediately. “You’re not bothering us, we haven’t had proper family time in ages and now everyone’s home all the time and down to just do family shit most days.” He grinned. “And I always wanted a little brother.”

“Fuck off, I’m not your brother.”

“Not yet.”

Tommy face palmed. “Fucks sake. Can you stop?”

“Do you not want to be my brother?” Wilbur sobered a little, a little more cautious

“What kind of question is that?”

“A genuine one. Would you really hate the idea of being my brother?” He asked sincerely. “Or is it the jokes, because I can stop those if they really make you uncomfortable.”

“I haven’t even considered it, because it’s not going to happen.”

“How do you know?” Wilbur challenged him. “Haven’t you seen the way they look at each other?”

“Plenty of guys have asked her out on a date, she never accepts any of them, why would Phil be different.” He said dismissively

Wilbur mulled that over. They drove up to the window and he was distracted for a bit giving their orders, getting some things for the other two as well.

“You know, I joke about it a lot, but even if nothing happens between Phil and Kristin I hope you’ll keep coming around.” He said finally as they pulled away, Tommy holding onto the bags of food.

“Clingy.”

“I’m serious.” He looked over. “You and Kristin both. It’s not just me, Techno likes having you around as well, he loves cooking and he loves being able to share it with someone. And you sit still for hugs, the others don’t.”

“Why?” He said finally. “I thought you didn’t like me, but you’ve been really nice lately.”

“I do. I make fun of everyone like that, I haven’t met many people who give me as good as I get though. I do like you.”

“Why?” Tommy challenged.

“I don’t really know.” He mused. “That’s a good question. I suppose... you remind me a bit too much of me, I guess.”

“Annoying?” He cracked a grin, “It’s a speciality.”

“No. More like you’ve seen a bit too much of the world before you got to be a kid.”

Tommy’s face froze. “What?”

“I don’t really need to explain, do I?” He turned the corner slowly, not looking away from the road. “I know you get nightmares; the walls aren’t that thick.”

Tommy flushed red. “Shut up.”

“Hey.” Wilbur reached out his hand, settling it on Tommy’s arm reassuringly. “I don’t mind, I swear, I don’t sleep much so you don’t wake me up. Just...Do you trust me?”

“Yes.” The answer slipped out very easily, almost surprising himself with how easily.

“You don’t have to tell me. But if you’re ever ready to, I’ll be here.” Wilbur assured him. “Whatever it is.”

“Secret for a secret, that’s the rules.” Tommy said smugly. “If I ever did that, you’d have to tell me all your deepest, darkest secrets.” He waited for the joking retort, but it didn’t come.

“One day.” Wilbur promised, completely sincere. “One day I’ll tell you everything. Deal?”

“Deal.” He didn’t quite know what he was agreeing to, but the smile was back on Will’s face, and he seemed a little less serious as they drove back

They pulled back into the drive, Wilbur getting out first, holding his hands out. “Go on. I know you want to.” Tommy barely even stayed long enough to hand the food over, flinging the door open and running inside, making a beeline for the room they’d set up for her. It was on the ground floor so she didn’t have to manage the stairs at the back of the house, voices drifting down the corridor from it.

“Mum!” Kristin broke into a wide smile. She looked comfortable, sat in the middle of a double bed surrounded by blankets and cushions. Phil had turned the bed so she could see the garden, bird song drifting in through the open windows from the trees.

“Hey.” He sat down next to her, leaning against her arm.

“Hi.” She leaned her head on his. “Nice to be out of that stuffy hospital room huh.”

“Stuffy?” Phil sat down next to her. “I’ll have you know there’s state of the art air conditioning in that room. I should know, they ranted at me for hours about it at the shares meeting.”

She laughed. It came much more easily, though she still winced a bit, patting Phil’s hand. “That must have been so hard for you.”

“You have no idea.”

She was silent for a few moments, watching her son with a slight smile.

“What?” He demanded.

Her eyes lit up a little. “I won’t be a car drive away anymore. I’m going to have to demand you spend time with me.”

“You’ll actually be around all day.” He realised. “Free holiday.”

“True. I wish it didn’t take this.” She waved her hand at her bandages. “To make it happen but there’s worse things.”

“Ranboo’s been showing me old movies, I’ll make you watch them.” He threatened. “They’re all sappy, he likes sappy movies.”

“Well then Ranboo has good taste.”

Phil came in, holding his phone. “Sorry to interrupt you, but he’s nearly here.”

“Oh, he’s early.” She sat up, making herself a little more comfortable

“Who’s early?” Tommy asked curiously

“Nothing to worry about.” She ruffled his hair, brushing a light kiss over his forehead before he could escape. “Go upstairs, I’ll tell you when you can come down, alright?”

“But...”

“We’ll talk in a minute.” She promised. “I just need to get this over and done with.” Wilbur led him upstairs, ignoring his protests. He promptly invited himself into Tommy’s room, stealing his duvet and chasing him around the room with it, trying to trap him underneath.

Techno joined them, sitting on a chair in the corner, book in hand, not paying them any attention as they squabbled back and forth. They’d made an attempt to listen in, but the floors sealed too much sound, they didn’t get much more than muffled voices

“What are they doing?” Tommy said restlessly. “It’s been ages.”

“It’s been like twenty minutes.” Wilbur corrected. “And not a clue, like all the other times you’ve asked.”

“Technooooo. What are they doing?”

“I don’t know either, but interrupt my reading again and I’ll turn this book into a deadly weapon.” Techno informed him. Tommy hesitated for a second, and then snatched the book out of his hands.

“No you won’t.”

“Ah. I have been disarmed.” He looked somewhat disappointed. “This is quite the predicament.”

“Fancy words you got there.”

“Predicament is not a fancy word.” He said, pained. “You’re just uncultured. Can I have my book back please?”

There was a car engine outside, and the book was completely forgotten, dropping to the floor. Techno let out a squeak of dismay, snatching it up, checking the cover hadn’t bent carefully “That’ll be him leaving.” Wilbur was watching out of the window. “Come on.” He barely had to say anything, Tommy running back down, heading back into Kristin’s room

“What was that about?” He demanded immediately

“Work stuff.” She replied. “I won’t be returning to work for quite a while, so they wanted me to sign some papers.”

“How long is quite a while?”

“Well. They recommended an extended leave of absence, but I’m actually leaving.” She said simply. “I quit.”

He stared at her “You what?”

“I quit my job.” She repeated. “I nearly died Tommy. I can’t do that again.” She reached up, pushing his hair out of his eyes gently. “I can’t lose you.”

“But...” He slid down next to her, confused. “You’ve always been there.”

“I know. Police work is all I’ve ever done.” She took his hand. “But I’m tired of it, tired of the politics, and the red tape and all of it. I lost a lot of good officers that night, I’m fighting a losing battle, and I’m not the right kind of person to fight it. Stressing about going back just isn’t worth it.”

Tommy glanced at Phil automatically “I had nothing to do with this.” He held up his hands in defense. “She’s been very set on it.”

“You could have told me.” Tommy protested. “At least.”

“I’d made up my mind, it happened very quickly. I was actually considering it before.” She admitted. “That’s why I had the meeting when you went over to the sleepover. One of the topics was who would replace me, it was only hypothetical but I found the reason I was looking for.”

“If you’re sure.” Tommy lay down next to her. “It’s going to be weird.”

“I’m going to be around.” She promised, wrapping her arm around him. “I know I haven’t always been, but I can now.”

“Don’t say that.” He said fiercely. “You’re the best mum I’ve ever had, don’t say that, you were always there.”

“Of course my little sunflower.” She teased him. “Whatever you say.” There was such a warmth, and love in her voice that he didn’t really know how to respond. He just tucked himself closer, stealing a part of the blanket, Techno and Will drifting in slowly.

“You seem happy here.” She said softly, watching on as they played a rather aggressive game of cards on the carpet, Tommy losing early and dropping out, retreating back to the bed “It’s nice to see.”

“It’s...not so bad.” He admitted at length. “I kinda like it.”

“It’s the safest place for you to be right now.” She said quietly. “I trust them.”

“I do too.” Time passed but he didn’t really notice it. It felt comfortable, and safe, like everything was slowly fixing itself. He ended up the corner eventually, tucked under Will’s arm, Techno chatting animatedly with Kristin about some book they’d both read, Phil watching on from his armchair on the other side, alert. She began to doze off after a little while and he rose to his feet, herding them out fussily, hushing Wilbur’s protests.

Tommy hovered by the door, looking back. “She’ll be alright.” He promised.

“I talked to her about it.” He assured him. “It was not a quick decision at all, she’s been building towards it for a while, not to mention she has plenty in savings, they paid her well, and she never really spent much of it so there’s no money worries. She’ll be staying here for now as we agreed, and when she’s better we can decide exactly what’s happening.

“Whatever happens, it’ll be her choice, you know she wouldn’t have it any other way.” Tommy did know, and it struck him for a moment how well Phil seemed to know her too. A few of his doubts eased a little, and he relaxed.

He started forward before he really thought about it, hugging him quickly. Phil jumped in surprise, and then leaned his cane against the wall, hugging him back. “Don’t worry. She’s safe here.”

“Thank you.” He let go as quickly as he’d given it, losing his burst of confidence. “Night.” He disappeared up the stairs as quickly as he could, a little embarrassed.

“Sleep well.” Phil called up after him, smiling slightly, shaking his head.

He was down again early the next morning. Kristin was awake, a cup of tea left by her bedside table along with the remains of a breakfast plate, probably by Phil. “Good morning sunflower.” She greeted him as he walked in,

“Morning.” He walked over, throwing the curtains open for her, sitting down in the armchair. They talked for a little bit about nothing in particular before Will appeared, dragging him into football out on the grass.

The rules were questionable at best and changing on a whim, normally Tommy’s. She watched them play from the window, waving whenever one of them looked over, looking very peaceful. It was almost sad, she seemed more peaceful now than before, as if a weight had been lifted off her shoulders, content to sit and watch from inside.

It was almost painfully domestic but he barely noticed, poring over Will’s atlas under the tree, completely oblivious to the rest of the world

Ranboo dropped by in the evening. He’d become just as accepted a part of this household as he had in the old house, basically just letting himself in through the garden gate, walking out to join them.

“Ranboo!” Kristin waved at him enthusiastically, patting the bed next to her. “Come over.”

“I-” She patted it again and he trailed over, ducking under the door, sitting down. He promptly got pulled into a tight hug. “You haven’t been eating enough.” She said critically. “Look at you.”

“I’m fine.” He complained. “You say this every time you see me.” Wilbur sniggered in the background.

“And every time, I’m right.” She patted his arm. “It’s good to see you. How have you been?”

“Alright. Mostly working. Speaking off.” He glanced over at Tommy. “Puffy dropped me off, she’s outside, she wanted to talk to you.”

“Now?”

“Preferably, she’s in a bit of a rush..” Tommy sighed, standing up, heading to the front of the house, leaving Ranboo with Kristin. Sure enough, a familiar pink mini was parked at the front, Puffy stood next to it, scrolling through her phone as she waited.

“Hey.” She greeted him with a bright smile, putting her phone away. “How are you doing?”

“I’m alright.” He stuffed his hands in his pockets.

“I got the bad news first, you’re back to work tomorrow. You were supposed to be back yesterday but I talked some extra days in so you could be here when she came home.”

“Oh.” He managed, taken aback. “Thank you.”

“Thank Ranboo, it was his idea.” The other boy ducked his head shyly, following him out

A sudden thought hit him, and he turned back. “I meant to ask. You were Archangel’s apprentice, right?” She blinked and then nodded slowly. “What was he like?”

“I was wondering when you’d ask me that.” She admitted, amused, “Niki always said you looked up to him.” Tommy flushed red, but she waved him aside. “It’s alright. He was a good man, always treated those around him with kindness. He was to us what Niki was to you, always standing up for the right thing even if it wasn’t the easy route. I’m not surprised you see him as a role model.”

“Huh.” He nodded slowly. “Thanks.”

“No problem.” She pulled out her keys, all 50 something of them, plus a mound of keyrings, it was a miracle how she found the one she needed. “Ranboo are you staying or…”

“I’m staying?” He glanced at Tommy.

“I need someone to play football with me,” Tommy said. “Techno’s a chicken and won’t play with me anymore.”

“That’s probably because you tried to kick his ankles in if I know you,” Ranboo said dryly. “Thank you for the ride Puffy. I’ll see you tomorrow.” She waved, getting back in her car, and they wandered back inside.

“Hey, Ranboo.”

Ranboo stopped in the doorway. Wilbur was stood on the sofa, arms hanging limply by his sides, staring straight at him blankly. “Uh, hey Wilbur.”

“How are you.” He said, in the same dry monotone

“I’m good? How are you?”

“Good.”

They looked at each other in silence for a few seconds. “Good talk?” Ranboo said finally

“Good talk.” Will didn’t move. Tommy wandered in, following the voices, taking one look at the older boy before wailing down the corridor

“Philllll! Wilbur’s being weird again!”

He could hear the adults laughing in Kristin's room. Techno patted his arm. "You called for pest control?"

"Yes please." He disappeared into the lounge and there was a discordant shriek. Tommy poked his head around curiously to see what was happening. Wilbur had been thrown over Techno's shoulder, the elder lifting him up with ease, carrying him out of the door towards the fish pond to increasingly louder shrieks.

"Should we help him?" Ranboo asked.

"Nah, he can deal with it. I'm just going to watch, you can go up if you want." Ranboo trotted off, but there wasn't much more to see, Wilbur freeing himself right before the pond, fighting back. Techno gave up, and Tommy headed for the stairs

"You need to tell him some day." Phil's voice drifted down the corridor, and he slowed mid step

"Not yet."

"Kristin."

"Phil." She replied, in exactly the same tone. "Let me raise my son as I see fit. Alright?"

"Tommy?" Ranboo glanced over his shoulder. "You coming?"

"Yep." He chased up after him, shutting his door behind him. "What are you up to? Puffy said you were working."

"Helping her with digitalising everything." Ranboo explained. "Just needed to take my mind off things, Warden's fine with it because it's not out in the open so I can stay after curfew."

"Isn't that dangerous?"

"I can get to and from the tower without being seen by Enforcers."

"Thanks for getting me the extra days off, by the way." He added. "I appreciate it."

"No problem. You seem like you had fun."

"Yeah." Tommy agreed. "It's a bit big and fancy but it's alright. I could get used to it."

"I mean for your mum's job you could have easily been in one of these places." Ranboo pointed out. "Honestly for her rank she chose a very odd house."

"House would have been too big. And too much attention."

"Ah, meta kid life huh." Tommy pulled a face, which was confirmation enough

"She was always way too careful about it." He added. "It's fine though, she's quit now."

Ranboo's eyes flickered, absorbing that slowly. "She really quit?"

“Yeah. Injuries and just got tired of it.”

“Huh.”

“Is that a problem?” He leapt to her defense, but the other boy shook his head, something clearly on his mind.

“No, it’s something else.”

“Did you hear about the roads? They’re not letting anyone out of the city.” Tommy nodded, sitting down on his bed.

“Phil was trying to go to work and they stopped him, we don’t know why.”

“I do.” Tommy sat up, intrigued, and Ranboo sat down next to him, pulling up a video on his phone “This is why I dropped by, you have to see this.”

The video was shaky at best, taken from a CCTV camera or something but he could see a group with the Enforcer logo on their arms standing outside a familiar police station, holding petrol cans. “What is this?”

“It’s the station near where you lived. The fire that burned your house was set by Enforcers.”

Chapter End Notes

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Double update because i missed a day, and also I'm really excited for things to start picking back in a chapter or so, so my brain won't let me stop writing

It's 5am, if you saw editing mistakes, no you didn't

Chapter 30

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Tommy played it again, and again. It wasn't very long, it got as far as the flames catching on and then cut out, going back to the start. "Where did you get this?"

"It's been circling around." Ranboo explained. "It leaked a few days ago but it's only just starting to catch on."

"What does this have to do with the roads closing?" He asked. "I don't get it."

"Apparently the ones who did it have gone rogue, they're trying to track them down."

"So the Syndicate infiltrated them and now they're running?" He played it over again, unable to tear his eyes away

"If they really managed to infiltrate Enforcers why would they waste it on burning down one police station." Ranboo reasoned. "Nothing about this makes sense."

"I mean they probably burned down all of them." Tommy said. "If they did this one. Didn't Purpled say something happened with the meta unit as well?"

Ranboo nodded. "They were killed. And all the information was stolen."

"So that one had to be the Syndicate, right? Enforcers have free access to that."

"I don't know." He took his phone back,

Tommy lay down, looking up at the ceiling. "What does this mean? What do we do?"

"I don't know. I just thought you should see it."

He started pacing back and forth, running his hand through his hair. "It has to be the Syndicate. But if it was why didn't they just say? It would be one more thing for people to hate them for, Schlatt loves that." He was muttering to himself at this point, Ranboo nodding along at the things he said, not fully paying attention to his ramblings but trying to look engaged.

He glanced at his wrist, pulling a face. It immediately drew Tommy's attention, trying to look over. "What is it?"

"Work. Emergency callout." He reached for his communicator, left discarded on his bedside table somewhere.

"You're not on duty, you won't have gotten it." Sure enough, there was nothing there, where the other boy's was flashing red

"I just want to get out of the house. I've been locked inside all week." He complained. "I gotta do something."

Ranboo laughed. "You have the opposite of a Purpled problem."

"You can't slander him like that when he's not here." Tommy pushed his arm playfully. "That's not fair. Anyway, what is it?"

"Protest on the high street." He read off his communicator, "Might turn into a riot."

"On second thoughts, riot duty fucking sucks." He slumped down.

"You've done it before?"

"Yeah, right at the start," He said glumly. "Enforcers just use you as a human shield. Came back with so many bruises and it was the middle of the summer so we were in the sun all day, got baked alive."

Ranboo processed that for a second. "Are you going to go? I need to go grab my stuff but I can port back here to pick you up if you want to."

Tommy stared at the wall for a second. "Sure." The other boy disappeared, reappearing a few minutes later to pick him up, teleporting onto the high street.

It was packed with a crowd of people, the noise beginning to swell, a noticeably high concentration of hybrids, none making any attempt to hide themselves or their hybrid features, most holding banners and hand-painted signs, a line of Enforcers already in place, riot shields up.

There was a hum in the air, the clock on the wall ticking towards 9pm but the crowds showed no sign of slowing. Android and Blaze stood at the front, Foxtrot hovering a little behind, trying to guide protestors peacefully away but it wasn't having much effect. The Captain was behind the shield line, directing people into place, one eye on the weapons the Enforcers held, trained on the crowd.

"Theseus, what are you doing here." She strode over to them. "You're not working 'til tomorrow."

"You said you needed people."

Void held up a hand, waving at her. "It was me." He intervened. "I showed him the alert."

She didn't look surprised in the slightest. "I assumed. Where are the other two."

"Here Captain." Spark popped up by her elbow, Purpled trailing behind.

"Purpled. Nice to see you on time."

Purpled rolled his eyes at her. "I'm never living that down am I."

"Nope." She replied cheerfully. "Right, the four of you stay somewhere safe for now, we have it handled, if you see any objects being thrown or anyone in danger sort it out but leave the rest to us."

They took shelter in an empty shop. It was boarded up before, but the boards had been broken at some point, lying on the ground torn right out of the wall, nails still poking out of the ends. Spark reached over, hovering his hand over them, melting the metal down with a concentrated blast of fire.

"Was that necessary?"

“Rather not have a rusty nail in my face if someone decides to act up. On your left.” Tommy spun around, a glass bottle stopped mid-air, hovering in place. “Ten points if you get it in the trash can.” He closed one eye, aiming down it and tossing the bottle up. It landed nearly in the bin with a clatter that was barely heard over the noise of the protestors.

“Nice!” Eryn held his hand up for a high five and Tommy met it with a grin.

Purpled sniggered suddenly, up on a wall looking over at the end of the street. “Some idiot tried to fistfight the Captain.”

“How did that go?”

Spark jumped up on a ledge nearby to look over the crowd. “He’s getting carried away. Not a scratch on her.”

“I would feel bad for him, but she never throws the first punch,” Purpled said

“You wouldn’t feel bad for him even if she did.” Spark shot back.

“Also true.” He hopped down. “Can’t imagine…”

“Traitors!” A sheep hybrid stopped right in front of him, glaring him down, her fists balled. “How can you help them!”

“Because I’m 17 ma’am, I don’t want to be in jail.” He retorted without skipping a beat. “It’s really nothing personal.”

“We’re just here to keep you safe.” Ranboo agreed softly.

“That’s not keeping us safe! You’re working with the people who did this!”

“I hope this young lady isn’t bothering you.” An Enforcer strolled over, eyes cold, one hand on his gun.

“She wasn’t,” Ranboo lied quickly.

“Yeah we were just talking,” Tommy joined. “It’s alright.”

The Enforcer arched an eyebrow. “Ma’am if you could come with us please.” She unloaded a string of expletives at him, and Spark turned away, already knowing what was coming, Void staring at the wall empty.

“Worth a try.” Purpled grabbed Tommy’s arm, turning him away as she was forced into handcuffs, and dragged towards the police vans. She was kicking and screaming, something falling out of her pocket as she was taken away.

Purpled leaned down, picking up the keyring that had fallen out of her pocket, a pair of black wings painted onto wood, homemade it seemed. “Look at this.” He shared a look with Ranboo, as if expecting him to understand whatever implied significance it had. The other boy studied for a moment and then nodded.

“Archangel. That’s not good.”

“What?”

“Anti-government symbol.” Purpled explained. “Designed to annoy Enforcers.”

“What?”

“Pisses them off, cos it’s a normal enough thing around fans that they can’t arrest people for it, but it’s basically a fuck you to them.” He began to scout around the back of the shop to see if there was anything interesting but it was pretty much an empty room, some peeled paint on the walls, a few broken shelves left behind but not much else.

“Why? I don’t get it.”

“Isn’t it obvious?” He picked up a piece of stone, tossing it at the wall, bored.

“Not really?”

“Because of he died.”

Tommy shuddered. “Yeah and? What’s that got to do with it?”

Purpled rolled his eyes. “Come on Theseus, you’re not that stupid. He pissed someone off so bad his wings were cut off and put up in the middle of the city. There’s only a few people he could make mad enough to do that, with the power to kill him, and I think we all know who that is.”

“They said that was Scar.” Tommy disagreed. “Or at least, people assumed.”

“They tried to cover it up but we know, and they hate it when people bring it up.” Purpled shrugged. “Besides, Scar conveniently died two days later in that Enforcer shootout so he never really got to defend himself.”

“He was a villain, no one would have listened anyway.” Void added.

“How do you know all this stuff?” Spark asked

“Hideout kid.” Purpled turned back, watching the crowds press by. The chants were getting louder, someone had a megaphone on the steps of the bank. With each passing minute the crowd was swelling to a worrying size. “You learn pretty quick to tell who you can and can’t trust.”

“I honestly thought they weren’t using these anymore.” Void held his hand out for it, examining it quietly. “Because the Enforcers clocked on a little too much.”

“Eh, they’re all idealists.” Purpled scoffed. “Think that a bit of polite protest is going to solve all our problems, those kinds of people hang on to this stuff. Look, there’s more.” Now he knew what to look for, they were everywhere, a belt buckle, a banner hoisted into the air, painted on the back of a jacket. Tommy snatched a brick out of the air, setting it down to join the neat pile next to him.

“This look like a polite protest to you?”

A glint appeared in Purpled's eye as he adjusted his mask. "You should see a real riot."

Void glanced over at Tommy. "You're thinking something." He said quietly

"I don't know what the hell is going on." He muttered, kicking a plank away from him. "And you and Purpled seem to have this new bromance thing going on."

"Theseus are you jealous?" Purpled mocked him, overhearing their conversation. "I think you're jealous."

"Shut the fuck up." He held his hand out for the charm and Void handed it over.

"We should probably leave." Ranboo suggested. "If they came here with people wearing those, it's going to get messy."

"What do you mean, messy?"

He looked left, and then right, dropping his voice. "The Enforcers know what it means. I mean one person with them can get away as a fan, this? Not a chance."

"We should warn them." Tommy tried to turn back, but Purpled grabbed his arm.

"They know." He told him as kindly as he could. "Believe me, if they came here, during a curfew, carrying those banners, they know."

His eyes filled with tears, fingers clenched around the charm. "Why?"

"Why what?" He didn't reply, shaking his head, frustrated. It became a rhythm, blocking projectiles, throwing it in the bins, over and over again. They weren't laughing anymore, the grim reality of the situation sinking in as more and more Enforcers began to arrive, far more than necessary to control the crowd.

His communicator buzzed but he ignored it, one eye on the sky. Void stared at his screen, before looking relieved. "Huh. Syndicate attack, that's good."

"What?" Eryn stared at him

"No no, not like that." He waved his hands. "Syndicate is their priority. They'll take units out of here to deal with it." He explained. "Never thought I'd be saying this, but it's the best thing that could be happening right now."

"Oh." He grinned. "True, well thank fuck for the Syndicate then." Purpled made a noise of agreement, focused on the crowd.

"Again?" Tommy glanced back. "It's only been a few days."

"They're getting more frequent." Spark glanced over, a wooden plank wielded by one of the marchers crumbling into ash in their fingers. A helicopter clattered over their heads, Purpled shading his eyes, looking up at it. "News." He sounded a little surprised.

"Okay, panic over, the news has eyes on them now."

Spark shook his head. "I think it's heading for the Syndicate, it's not going to stop."

"No it's seen us." It slowed, circling above them slowly

"Watch." Purpled pointed at the crowd. The black wings here and there disappeared quietly, only a few remaining. "It's not over. They might tell the helicopter to go or something, but I think we're good."

"Can't pull shit with the news watching." Spark agreed. There was a slight release of tension, but the danger was in no way past, Purpled crouched up on a second floor ledge, keeping a sharp eye on the Enforcers for any sign of aggression. Tommy rested his head against the wall, exhausted.

A loud, wailing alarm went off above their head, and Tommy's blood ran cold, feeling sick. A kind of silence fell, the first thing to hush the crowd. He looked at the others, panicked, seeing the same fear reflected at him, Purpled's usual bravado gone, his face sheet white.

"Curfew." Spark whispered. "Oh fuck."

A moment passed, and then two, none of them daring to move, as if it would make any difference. Feet shifted on concrete, hushed voices whispering back and forth, all eyes turned to the Enforcer units at the end, now slightly depleted by those who'd left to the Syndicate attack, but no less heavily armed.

Figures huddled in the puddles of light under street lamps, waiting for the sirens to end, the haunting echo reverberating through the buildings.

"They're not firing." Ranboo whispered

"They can't." Spark whispered. "Right? That's too many people."

"The helicopters still here." Tommy pointed up. "They won't."

"I mean it's either show curfew can be broken or commit a massacre." The sirens cut as suddenly as they'd begun and the sharpshooter slid down to join them, hitting the floor with a grunt that was oddly loud in the silence that followed. He crouched to them, a little closer to the wall in case they needed to take cover. "And I don't know which one is going to win."

It felt like forever, but it couldn't have been more than half a minute or so. The sound began to bounce back a little, but there was now a visceral tension in the air. It had turned from a protest into actively breaking the law, and the mood shifted with it to something more dangerous, more volatile.

A few people peeled off, disappearing into the streets, but more stayed, even more appearing as news spread. Tommy pressed a hand to his chest, trying to slow his breathing, adrenaline pounding.

"Theseus?" Void leaned over, looking worried, "You good?"

"Don't feel great." He said quietly. "Planning how to sneak out of here."

“We can’t until the Warden lets us.” He said doubtfully

“I mean he doesn’t want me here anyway.” Tommy pointed out. “You can say I got hurt or something and you had to take me home.”

Void’s eyes lit up. “Yes.” He grabbed Tommy’s arm. “Captain.” He leaned over to Puffy. “I’m taking Theseus home, He reopened some stitches.”

She looked around. “Uh Supreme can...” They disappeared before she could finish her sentence, setting down back in his room. Tommy ducked into the bathroom, changing quickly, suddenly hating the feel of his uniform against his skin, throwing it in the corner before remembering to pack it away, stuffing it at the back of his closet just in case.

“I should head back.” Ranboo said unwillingly, lingering in the doorway. “Warden’s going to get mad if I don’t.”

“You could stay. We can make an excuse?” Tommy tried, but even he knew it was useless. He deflated slightly, spinning the charm around his hand. “I’ll see you tomorrow?”

“Yeah, see you then.”

He vanished. The room felt very empty all of a sudden. Tommy lay down, dangling the charm from his fingers, turning it over and over as if it would give him answers of some kind.

He tucked it in his pocket at last, stomach growling, reminding him he’d missed dinner. He made his way downstairs quietly, seeing all the lights were off, treading on the edges of the stairs so they didn’t make a sound.

Normally at least one person was up, usually Techno, hunched over a book in the lounge with a steaming cup of tea, but there was nothing. It felt odd, eerily still, there was no one in their rooms, no light under the doors, no footsteps on the ceiling, no one was home.

He stuck his head around Kristin’s door to check on her, but she was fast asleep so he left her to it, going to dig through the fridge, taking out some leftover pasta and other bits and pieces, reaching for his phone to text Will.

He spotted a white object as he did, sat innocently on the table, food left half eaten behind it as if someone had left in a rush. He reached over to pick it up, taking a bite of out a cereal bar, and then dropped it as if it had burned his hand, staring.

Orpheus’s mask lay on the tabletop, the sockets staring at him empty. He picked it up again turning it over in his hands in confusion. “What the hell?”

There was a faint rush of air behind him. He glanced around to see if anyone was there, squinting at the shadows around the pool of light cast by the open fridge. For a moment he could have sworn they moved. “Hello?”

A hand closed over his mouth, stifling his breath, cutting off any attempt to scream

“Hello Theseus.”

Chapter End Notes

Happy valentines day folks!

[Join the Discord](#)

We have memes, theories, a denial cult, an open war over musical instruments and my random ramblings while I'm writing

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[Welcome Home Theseus spotify playlist](#)

I update this per chapter that has a song attached to it, I have a channel explaining why I chose each one in the Discord if you're curious

Chapter 31

Chapter Notes

The song for this chapter is Trust me not (hero and villain duet) by backseat vagabond

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

The hand released him. He opened his mouth to scream but wasn't fast enough

"*Quiet.*" The cry died in his throat. He was let go, spinning around and stumbling back, hitting the countertop, putting his hands back to steady himself.

Orpheus stood opposite him, in the dim light of the fridge, a slight smirk under his mask. "I mean, if you wanted one of your own, you could just have asked."

"You!"

"Me." He held himself with an almost arrogant confidence, so wholly out of place, and yet so at home, humanised by the mundane surroundings and yet more of a ghost, his feet making no sound on the tiles as he glided towards him. Tommy shrunk back, feeling completely exposed without his mark, suddenly horribly aware of Kristin in the other room, defenceless and asleep.

"W...What is this? What do you want." He managed, eyes darting around for some kind of escape but the villain was stood right in front of the door. "Why are you here?"

"I don't want anything from you." He reached in his in his pocket, taking out a small, black device, keeping his eyes on Tommy. "Achilles?"

"Everything alright?" A muffled voice replied.

"Wasn't fast enough. He found it on the table."

"We'll be there in a minute. Don't do anything stupid."

The smirk widened. "No promises."

"Orpheus don't you..." He switched the device off, clipping it back on his belt, making direct eye contact with Tommy.

"I don't think we've met. Not like this anyway."

Tommy reached back, scrabbling for a steak knife left discarded on the side in a pitiful attempt to protect himself. "*I wouldn't do that if I were you.*" He wavered, fingers falling to the countertop just short. Orpheus reached up, pushing his hood down to reveal aching familiar curly hair, a wry half smile under the opera mask.

"Wait." He could only watch, transfixed as Orpheus reached up, slipping the mask off with a triumphant smile, meeting his eyes with a kind of mischief.

“Hello Tommy.”

“W...Will?” He whispered, almost unwilling to say it, as if speaking his name out loud would make it real.

“You should have stayed at the riot.” Will put his mask on his belt, arms folded. “But between you and me, I’m glad you didn’t.” He was so calm, a smile hanging on his lips, looking down at Tommy like nothing had happened

“Is this some kind of joke?” His voice was hoarse, he couldn’t manage any louder.

“Would you believe me if I said yes?”

Tommy sunk down. “I’d want to.”

“My mistake.” He picked up the mask, studying it. “We were in a rush, I left the spare behind.”

Tommy was shaking his head desperately. “Will stop.” He begged. “Please. This isn’t funny anymore, this isn’t funny.” He began to back away towards the door.

“*Don’t move.*” He froze in place, arms locked to his sides. The final nail in the coffin as awful reality sunk in.

“No. No, no you like photography and maps and, and you, you’re not him.” He whispered. “You’re not, you can’t be, you wouldn’t lie like that.” He shook his head desperately. “What have you done with Will? Have you hurt him, I swear if you’ve hurt him I’ll kill you.” He tried to move back, but only overbalanced, legs glued to the floor. Wilbur caught him, lowering him to the ground, resting him against the cupboards.

He knelt down in front of him, reaching out, brushing a hand against his cheek. “You weren’t supposed to find out this soon.” He said sadly, in a voice far too gentle for Tommy to handle. “They wanted to give you longer, but I was done waiting.” Some part of him saw the cruel parody, of the gear and mask he hated and feared, and the man he was ready to call his brother wearing it. He shrunk down against the oven, completely helpless, a puppet on a string.

“What are you talking about?” Wilbur reached out, pushing Tommy’s hair behind his ear, something Kristin had done to him a thousand times, but this didn’t feel safe, the movement sinister. There was no mistaking the care in Will’s eyes either, which made it all worse somehow. He was clinging onto that, even faced with what he knew was a monster he couldn’t shake that.

“I probably shouldn’t tell you.” He laughed. “Who am I kidding, I shouldn’t have told you any of this.” He got to his feet, pacing back and forth. “But I’ve been waiting for so long for someone to tell. I have lied to people for years and years, and when I finally get the chance to speak they want to wait.”

He clenched and unclenched his fists, throwing his arms up suddenly in frustration. "I think they just didn't know how. I think you'll react just the same whenever we tell you. So I took matters into my hands." For a moment a shred of guilt crossed his expression, and then it was gone as quickly as it came. "You're probably mad at me, I don't blame you. But it's done now."

"Please don't hurt her." He whispered, watching Orpheus's every move, barely hearing what he was saying

"Kristin?" Tommy visibly flinched at her name out of his enemy's mouth. "I would never."

"You did this on purpose, didn't you. You trapped her here, and me with her." He tried to stand, to get to her, but nothing worked, nothing responded, he was a prisoner of his own body and helpless to stop it.

"We didn't trap her." Wilbur said, oddly cheerful. "She agreed to this." He reached out, patting Tommy's shoulder. "It's alright Theseus, it'll all be okay. Just trust me, follow my lead and this will all be alright." His voice was so soft, comforting, he wanted to believe him, he didn't even know if it was Wilbur's powers anymore, or just some old, misplaced faith in him.

"You called me Theseus." The realisation made its way through the fog that had suddenly clouded his thoughts. "Like Techno."

"He did, didn't he." Wilbur smiled slightly. "We were so close to the truth so many times, even with a joke nickname. I would never have taken you for a hero." Tommy's shock must have registered on his face. "I recognised you during the hospital fight, when you threw yourself in front of Kristin, I knew." He told him, a little smug. "We've known who you are for a while, there's no need to lie to us anymore about that intern job or whatever it was."

Tommy flushed red. "You..."

"Knew you were lying. We're even." He hesitated for a moment. "It's...only fair. I know you didn't want to lie to us."

"Not like this." Tommy whispered. "Not ever like this. That was my decision to make, when I felt ready, and safe."

"The Agency doesn't even let you tell family if you can help it." Will said flatly. "I know their policy, I checked. I'm sorry I had to do it like this but I don't want to play that game. I'm not good at games, something had to break."

"I trusted you." Something saddened in Wilbur's eyes, a kind of guilt, and grief of a kind, but it was gone as fast as it came.

"Well I guess that was your first mistake." It wasn't triumphant, or smug, it was bitter, a kind of hollow victory as he spoke, and he knew it too.

"Will wouldn't do this to me." His voice cracked. "You're not my Will. This isn't real"

“It’s real.” Wilbur said, in a tone that would have been reassuring in any other situation, completely relaxed. He refused to believe it, he wouldn’t accept it, but some part of him already had. Some part had let the Watsons slip through his fingers, accepted long ago it was too good to last, and maybe this wasn’t how he saw it happening but it felt like a confirmation in the most awful way of what he’d already known.

“We’re not going to hurt you Toms.” He said carefully, watching a light die in Tommy’s eyes. “I swear.”

“Don’t call me that. I don’t believe you.”

“If we wanted you hurt, or dead, you would never have made it out of that fight.” He insisted

“That’s so reassuring.” He managed to collect himself for a second, retorting as sarcastically as he could. “Cos you know, you’ve never killed people before.”

“That’s...different. I care about you.”

“Have you considered that I might have cared about some of the people you killed.” He hissed. Wilbur paused, mulling his next words over

“The actions we took were...regrettable. But necessary. You’ll understand one day.”

“You’re insane.” Even he could hear how weak it sounded. “Why. Why this, why me?” It sounded plaintive, childlike even to his own ears, and somehow all the more desperate for it.

“It was a matter of time before someone slipped, believe me, it was better this way.” He rose to his feet, footsteps coming closer to the door. Tommy managed a soft cry, hoping for help

Techno pushed the door open, and he sat up, relieved at the sight of an ally. But he didn’t even blink, pulling a hoodie on, nodding to Will. Tommy visibly broke, face falling, huddled in the corner as far away from them as he could get. A lifeline snapped, something tearing in his chest as another piece of trust burned, but he couldn’t move, he couldn’t do anything.

Techno sighed, looking down at the boy in the corner, a kind of cold distance in his expression. “You should have been more careful.”

“Lethe assured me Tommy was still at the riot, I thought I had more time.” Wilbur lied

“And how long ago was that?”

“Only like 20 minutes ago. He shouldn’t have been able to get across the city in that time.”

“Void must have bought him back.” Techno frowned, casting Wilbur a suspicious glance, before looking back to Tommy

“You know Syndicate stuff doesn’t come inside the house and this is exactly why.”

“It was one time,” Wilbur protested. “How was I meant to know.” He waved his hand, and the compulsion lifted slightly, letting him sit up. Tommy’s eyes locked onto his phone, left discarded on

the table with a half written message to Will, trying to take advantage of their distraction to reach towards it

A blade shot from Techno's sleeve, and he snatched his hand back, not a moment too soon. It cut right through, cracking the screen, pinning it against the table.

"What the fuck." He was shaking, staring at the flickering screen.

"I'm sorry." He didn't look anything of the kind. "But I've already had enough trouble for one evening, I don't need any more Enforcers involved."

Tommy shrunk back, staring at it. A sudden sinking feeling hit him, coupled with a stark realisation. He felt stupid. He had nothing to hide anymore, and nothing to lose. He flexed his fingers experimentally and a familiar red glow appeared around them. It wrapped around Wilbur's chest, lifting him up into the air. He cried out, struggling against it, and Tommy grinned in triumph, reaching his hand out.

He stopped short, unable to do it. This wasn't a faceless terrorist anymore, this was Will. Wilbur who'd taken him shopping, Wilbur who'd made a place for him in his home when he had nowhere else to go, Wilbur who'd taken him out for food just the day before to settle his nerves, promising Kristin would be safe. And more than that, he wasn't just scared, or angry, he wanted to know. He wanted an explanation, something, anything from all of this.

The decision was made for him. A hand wrapped around his wrist, and the glow flickered, and then died completely, dropping him on the floor. Wilbur wasn't fast enough to keep himself up, falling onto the floor, but the grip didn't lessen. Tommy felt hollow, but this revelation didn't shake him somehow, he'd gone numb, both understanding what had just happened and not taking it in at all. It was like someone had given him a heart of paper and wrapped their fist around it, crumpling it up, watching it crack under the pressure. Each new revelation only opened a new wound, the creases deepening, crushing him bit by bit.

"Now look what you've done." Tommy flinched, but it wasn't aimed at him, Techno's expression furious as he looked down at his brother. "Don't underestimate him, you're getting arrogant."

"What the hell was that for." Wilbur dusted himself off. "It's not my fault, I had it handled if you'd just given me a moment. You didn't have to do that." He frowned. "Let go of him." He reached out and Techno slapped his hand aside.

"Hey!"

"That, was for being a dickhead." Techno said flatly. "He's scared Wilbur. He is going to lash out, and I'm quite happy not to risk that." Tommy raised betrayal filled eyes to Techno's, brimming with tears as much as he tried to hold them back.

“I’m sorry. This wasn’t how this was supposed to go.” Techno said quietly.

“You didn’t have to do that! We could have gotten away with it.” Wilbur argued, almost sulking a little

“You were in danger, don’t tell me what to do.” His brother wasn’t having any of it. “And it’s too late, he knows, and even if he didn’t he could assume, he’s smart enough. You didn’t just put yourself at risk, you exposed all of us.”

“He’s just a kid. What can he do?” Wilbur tried to say it as lightheartedly as possible, but it fell flat.

“That’s not funny Orpheus.” Tommy finally managed. Wilbur winced at the name, filled with so much venom. Even their loudest squabbles hadn’t come close to this, this was real, this was cold, and angry, every word Tommy spat laced with the violence he couldn’t bring himself to act on.

“Enough!” Wilbur’s head shot up guiltily as Phil stepped in, his voice carrying a weight of authority that he’d never heard from the usually mild-mannered man, leaning on his cane. “Techno, let him go.”

Techno released his grip slowly. “I’m sorry Theseus...”

“Don’t call me that.” Tommy spat. “You have no right. You have no right to that name. Or any of the jokes, or nicknames you had for me, you have no fucking right.”

Wilbur reached out for him but he pulled away. “Don’t touch me.” He yanked himself away. “Don’t try and pretend you fucking care.”

“I do care.” Wilbur insisted, holding onto his arms, ripping away his chance of escape. “Tommy believe me, I really do.”

“You’re not getting anywhere with this.” Phil said calmly. “Will, do it.

Wilbur looked up, alarmed. “Come on. Not him, please.”

“There’s no other way.” Phil said firmly. “This is your mess, you fix it.”

“There has to be.” Wilbur pleaded. “Come on, I can bring him around.”

“You and I both know that’s not true.” He leaned on his cane. “Do it.” He left no room for argument. Wilbur turned to Tommy unwillingly

“Will?”

“I’m sorry.”

"You will not speak of this to anyone outside this house." He began

"Will." Tommy backed off. Orpheus took another step towards him, effectively cornering him, Techno on the other side,

"You will keep this all secret, our identities stay secret, as does anything you find out, in any way about what we do. If anyone asks, you don't know, you know nothing, you saw nothing, you had no idea we were anything except a normal family." He stopped, making a choked cough, clutching his throat, and Tommy sunk to the ground, his head, spinning.

"You should have told him to forget." Achilles said grimly after a short silence. Wilbur shook his head.

"Not again. I'm not doing that again. I can't." He sounded hoarse, like he'd damaged his throat

"Not your decision to make." Phil leaned on his cane, looking troubled.

"We can bring him round." Wilbur protested. "I know we can, he'll understand."

"Your soft spot is going to get us killed." Techno said flatly

"It's Tommy." He said stubbornly. "I won't do it, and you can't make me." His brother sighed but said nothing.

"We'll tell you everything." Wilbur promised. "Just, work with me."

"What are you going to do with me?" His voice broke a little, terrified.

"Nothing." Wilbur said softly. "Just....stay with us, alright. Once Kristin's better we'll get you a new apartment, you can get out of here, there'll be no link to the Syndicate, you won't ever have to speak to me again, if that's what you really want."

"It can't be that easy. You won't let it be that easy."

"It will be that easy." Phil cut in. "And Wilbur won't be involved." He fixed him with a cold look.

"Don't think I don't know you left that mask behind on purpose."

"Don't know what you're talking about." Wilbur lied far too easily, but it was no use. He almost shrunk under the ice behind Phil's glare.

"There is a reason we make decisions like this as a family. We'll be having words about this later." He turned without another word, striding out, cane tapping against the floor

"This is your mess. You chose this, against what we said, you sort it out." Techno glanced over at Tommy with a shred of pity. "I'm sorry about this kid. It's nothing personal."

"You can go." The compulsion on him lifted, and he stood slowly, stretching his arms out, before bolting full sprint for the door. Wilbur leaned out to catch him but Techno held his arm out, stopping him.

"Let him go."

“But...”

“Let him go. He can’t do anything now.” He ducked under Wilbur’s arm, making a panicked beeline for Kristin’s room, throwing the door open. She was awake looking slightly disorientated like she’d woken suddenly, the bedside lamp on.

“Tommy?” She pushed herself up, concerned. “Are you alright?”

“They’re....” He managed.

“The Syndicate? I heard.”

Chapter End Notes

If you saw me battling with the italic formatting for some time, no you didn't. Anyway, cats out of the bag, I'm sure this will have no emotional consequences on anyone

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A House but not a Home

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

“They’ve been kind to us, to you.” Kristin said gently. “Wilbur is really good for you.”

Tommy felt numb, ice crystalising in his chest, piercing his lungs. “They got you too.”

“What do you mean they got you?” He sunk down on the end of her bed

“Will, Orpheus. What did he say to you?”

Her eyes widened in understanding. “Oh no, nothing like that. There’s no need to worry.”

Something rotten and awful was slowly dawning on him, rooted in the calm in her expression, something that sunk like ice into his chest.

“You knew.” It was one thing to be betrayed so badly by Will, someone who, for all intents and purposes was still new in his life. It was quite another to look in the face of the first person he’d called family and know that she’d lied to him.

“Do you remember, when you came back from patrol with Niki, upset.” She said quietly. “It wasn’t even that long ago, a few days after the ball, can’t be more than a month or so. I told you I knew a man once just like you. Just as proud, and courageous.” She laughed softly. “That he left me promising for a better world for people like you.”

“You also said he was dead.” Tommy replied, painfully blunt.

“I thought he was. Maybe the man I knew is gone.” She paused, thinking for a bit. “That was Phil, a very long time ago.”

Tommy stared at her. “And? He’s a supervillain, you’re the chief of police, were, whatever. Why are you so calm about this?”

“They would never hurt us.” She said it with a simple confidence that he wanted to believe so badly.

“You don’t know that! They literally...” He stopped. The words wouldn’t come out of his mouth, he couldn’t say it, but she understood him.

“I think Tsunami’s case is more complicated than we thought. Whoever killed her, I don’t think it was them.”

“Then why are they hiding it. Orpheus wiped my memory! Why didn’t you say something if you knew?” He burst out.

Her expression softened a little. “It’s alright. I promise things will make sense.”

“Is that all you have to fucking say.” Tommy put his head in his hands. “Really?”

“Language.” She noted absentmindedly. She looked exhausted, tired and worn, her normal alertness replaced by a new weariness, injuries and stress taking their toll. There were new lines around her eyes he hadn’t noticed until now.

“Shut up. I learned most of it from you.”

She acknowledged that with a slight smile, patting the bed next to her. “Sit. I think we need to have a talk.”

“We need to go.”

“Even if that was true, I’m not going anywhere like this.” She said gently, pointing at the bandages.

“They did this on purpose.” He accused immediately. “I know they did.”

“Tommy. Sit.” Her voice hardened a little, and he reacted automatically, taking a proper seat at the end of the bed. She reached up, running her hand through his hair gently, her eyes shining. “Look at you. You look so grown up.”

“What does that have to do with anything?”

“You know I never wanted to be Commissioner.” She took his hand in hers. “I was a detective, back when all this started, I started out at the bottom like everyone does. I’d been in the job for about a year when we raided the first meta hideout, I felt awful. It felt so wrong, I chose this job to help people, not rip apart someone’s home and family.”

“What...”

“Ssh.” She hushed him gently. “Listen carefully. I have waited a long, long time to tell you this, I wanted to protect you for a bit longer but we’ve run out of time. I met Phil there.”

“You really knew him before?” Tommy asked disbelievingly. “Does that mean...”

“Sssh. He was there with the Agency, he used to work for them, a long time ago.”

“What, like paperwork or something?”

An odd look crossed her expression. “Something like that. We talked a bit, now and then. He was kind.”

“You liked him.” Tommy said, resigned, recognising the fond tone in her voice

“Don’t sound so surprised.” Kristin protested. “He was very charming. And handsome.”

“He’s old!”

She gave him a patient smile. “Not back then he wasn’t. And besides, we’re the same age Tommy.”

“What’s the point of this? He was your crush years ago, so what, he’s literally killed people.” Tommy said, frustrated. “I don’t see what part of this isn’t getting through.”

“That’s because I’m not done.” She explained. “While I was doing that job was ordered to accompany a high-security transport and somehow files leaked detailing what we were carrying. Two boys, aged 13 and 11 respectively. They had no good reason to be holding two children, and be transporting them across the country with an armed guard, when they had no criminal record. I had no one else to go to, I took the files to Phil.”

“And you didn’t get caught?”

“I was just a detective, someone gave me orders and I followed them, I had no idea he had bad intentions, that’s what I told them.” She gazed off in the distance, watching only something she could see. “I told him where the convoy was going to be. It was over and done with before anyone knew anything. They gave me a promotion to keep me quiet, villainised Phil, and I stayed put, what else could I do.”

“Cool story. He’s literally killed people.” Tommy repeated.

“He would do anything for them, just as I would do for you.” She told him; her voice sung through with so much love it almost took him aback. “I hope if you ever have children, that you never have to understand what that’s like.”

He crushed the duvet in his fingers, balling his hand into a fist, and then releasing it slowly “So, you knew Wilbur and Techno.”

“For a few minutes, as they fled from a burning convoy.”

“Did you recognise him? At the ball? Did you always know?” He demanded.

She smiled softly. “Yes and no. Immediately, but I didn’t let myself believe it. It had been years after all.”

“Do you think he recognised you?”

“I’m not sure.” Kristin leaned her head against the pillow. “Maybe he thought I didn’t know, maybe he really didn’t have a clue who I was. After all, I was just some detective he saw during work now and then, it’d been years. He knows now though.”

Tommy was silent for a few moments. “Great. Now how does this help us get out.”

“Tommy.” She said tiredly. “Did you listen to any of what I just said. Phil is not who you think he is, none of them are. They’re the products of a system that hurt them, you’re not so different.”

“Am I going crazy. Cos everyone around me seems to have lost their mind.” He clenched his fist around the rose petals, nails digging into his skin. “I’m talking to a fucking wall on every side, and I’m sure I’m talking sense but I’m not fucking getting through. I don’t care if you have some anecdote about Phil, I don’t care if he saved some kids when he was younger, he’s killed people.” He dragged his hand through his hair. “Forget all that. You told Phil he could have guardianship of me if anything happened, knowing who he was.”

“Yes.” She said simply. “Because I know, no matter what you think, there was nowhere safer for you in the city.”

“Are you kidding me!”

“You know, you could pass for Phil’s son if you wanted.” She noted. “Blonde hair, same eyes, it’s close enough.”

“What does that have to do with anything?”

“Nothing.” She sighed. “I understand Phil, I don’t support everything he does but I know he has a reason. Many reasons, actually, and I know if it was me in his place, I would do anything to protect you. I know the boys wouldn’t let anyone lay a finger on you.”

“What if he’s changed.”

“I don’t know, I haven’t known Phil for years and years. But the man I knew was a good man, even when he was surrounded by terrible people, he stayed a good man. You can trust him.”

“The Syndicate are awful and he’s helping them.”

“I think this is so much more complicated than you would like it to be.” She said as kindly as she could. “Good and evil, black and white, it doesn’t exist, the Agency, the Enforcers, the Syndicate, they may as well be different sides of the same coin in the end.”

“I don’t know what to do.” Tommy curled up. “This doesn’t make any sense, that’s the Syndicate! I need to do something.”

“There’s nothing you can do. Even if you did turn them in, you would become a suspect as well. They won’t be forgiving.”

He slumped forward, burying his head in a pillow “Why.” The desperate wail came out kind of muffled. “Why me. Why does the universe hate me, in particular?”

“It could be worse.”

“Could it really.” He said bleakly. He pressed his head into his hands. “If it was anyone else I’d already be turning them into the Agency.”

“Then why haven’t you?” She asked

“Because Will put a fucking compulsion on me.” He spat. “I can’t. Even if I wanted to I can’t.”

“You don’t want to?” She raised one eyebrow curiously

“I like Wilbur! And Techno and Phil, they’re kind, well, they were kind. And maybe they were lying about it all but I didn’t think they were bad people. And I want to keep you safe and we have nowhere else to go and Orpheus put a fucking compulsion on me that means I can’t tell people and it’s just all awful and I hate it.” He sighed heavily, grabbing a pillow and burying his face in it. “But mainly we don’t have anywhere else to go, and you’re ill.” He mumbled through the fabric. “What can I do?”

“Give them a chance,” Kristin suggested.

“You can’t be serious.” He scoffed

“Don’t be so dramatic Tommy. Just give it a try.”

“I’m not being dramatic.” His voice cracked. “This isn’t dramatic, this is real. You don’t understand, you weren’t there. I was the one standing under City Hall as it collapsed, I was the one who ran back to the Agency with Niki’s blood on my hands, who still can’t remember what happened. They know what happened to her. They have the closure that I don’t get!”

Her hand tightened a little. “I’m sorry.” She said gently. “We’ll talk this over again when I’m better. I’m not very good at this right now.”

Tears were brimming in her eyes he realised now, she was trying to hold it together for him but she clearly wasn’t at her best or even close to it, barely able to keep up with his interrogation. He leaned forward, hugging her.

“I’m sorry. I just don’t know what to do. I don’t understand why. I don’t know what’s happening.” He whispered

“I know. I’m sorry sunflower, I’m so sorry.” She reached up, embracing him back, holding onto him as tightly as she could.

“It’s not your fault.” He assured her. “We’ll...I don’t know, we’ll talk at some point. I’ll leave you to sleep.” He got up, heading towards the door, only to be tugged back. She held onto his hand for a moment, as if she couldn’t bear to let go, before her fingers slid through his, too tired to hold it up anymore.

He shut the door, taking a deep breath and squaring his shoulders, walking towards the kitchen as assertively as he could manage. Phil was stood inside, an empty mug in front of him, the kettle coming to a boil with a surge of steam. There was no sign of his sons. It looked completely domestic, the older man in a warm jumper, cane leaned against the table, busying himself around the cupboards.

He hovered by the entrance, almost wishing he could go back, pretend this really was normal, that Phil was nothing more than a father and an architect, but he couldn’t shake that cold voice, he couldn’t unsee the way Wilbur begged him not to let their secret out. He crept a little closer before he really realised what he was doing

“For what it counts, I’m sorry.” He spoke up without any warning. Tommy froze in the doorway, not realising he knew he was there. Phil didn’t turn around, staring out of the window. “I’ve talked with Will, and I’ll talk him again properly in the morning, what he did wasn’t right and went against everything we discussed.”

“Is that supposed to make me feel better about living with terrorists? You’re just fine with this.”

“I’m not an innocent bystander.” He set the kettle down. “I won’t pretend to be either, I play my part.”

“You got him to put...it... on me.”

Phil nodded grimly. "It wasn't personal, but all it takes is one person and everything we've built comes down. I can't take chances like that, not when it comes to my family."

Tommy folded his arms, leaning against the door frame. "Right and how long were you planning to lie to me."

"As long as we could." He answered honestly. "If anything went wrong, it would be best that you had some kind of plausible deniability."

"And now I know. You could have just fucking written the warrant."

He held up a hand, shaking his head. "Actually no. You won't be able to tell them anything, and should they try and question you they'll recognise signs of Wilbur's powers. They'll make assumptions, as much as I dislike how he did it he was right, this is the best way to keep you safe. If anything ever went wrong, you will just be a victim who had no choice in the matter." Tommy felt a tiny knot of worry untangle, against all the odds. He has a way out, this wasn't as bleak as it seemed, he could work with that.

"I'm not going to pretend that was the only reason I did it, but I do want to keep you safe." He continued, pouring himself a cup of tea, offering the kettle to Tommy, who shook his head quickly. "Like I said, I'm sorry, it's not ideal, none of this is."

"You don't say."

"Hear me out. I'm willing to offer you a compromise." He reached for his cane, leaning on it heavily. "You stay here until Kristin is better, you say nothing, don't draw any attention to yourself or us, and I'll make sure you have a house and enough money so that she can retire." Phil proposed. "You don't have to believe that I care, but I don't want her to ever go back to a job that treated her like that one did."

"You're right. I don't believe you." Tommy snapped. "How am I meant to trust you."

"You don't have to. As sinister as it probably sounds now, I know you won't leave while she's still here, so you'll just have to wait and see. And if you have anything you want to say to me, say it." Phil prompted him. "I know you're angry, and probably scared, and confused, and I wish I could give you all the answers and make this okay but I can't."

"I don't have anything to say to you." Tommy spat, but it barely got a reaction. Phil was silent for a few beats, watching the steam rise from the mug, lost in thought.

"For what it's worth, they'd be devastated to see you go." He said finally. "But it will be your choice, in the end." He turned away a little, and Tommy turned on his heel, desperate to get to the safety of his room. He was in such a hurry to leave he almost didn't hear Phil's parting words, intended for no one but the kettle and the countertop. "For what it's worth, I would be too."

It was worth something, whether he liked it or not. The words curdled, sinking in his stomach as he stumbled through his bedroom door, yanking it shut, turning the lock with shaking hands. He made it about three steps towards his bed before collapsing onto the carpet, burying his head in his hands, doubled over, a choked sob wrenching his shoulders, stealing all the air from his lungs.

There were few things that hurt more than coming so close and still being so far from everything he'd ever wanted, and of those things was having it in his hands and watching it get stolen right out of them, the illusion irreparably shattered, and ground into dust for good measure.

Chapter End Notes

*picks up wht!Tommy" This boy can fit so much trauma in him

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Where there was fire (pt1)

Chapter Notes

The title is an old proverb, "Where there was fire only ashes remain" it basically means that when you love someone, a bit is always left behind. No matter what, it stays, it's ashes but it's still there and you can't get rid of it

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Will set his keys down on the table and Tommy visibly flinched at the sound, shrinking away, hovering protectively over his bowl of soup. "I'll drop you off." Tommy didn't dignify him with a response, glaring at him. "You can't walk. Enforcers are still out and about."

"You're fucking spying on me." He spat. "I can't even go to work without you having to tag along."

"Oh for goodness sake Tommy, what am I going to do? Kidnap you?"

Tommy gave him an odd look. "Why would you need to. I'm already stuck here aren't I."

"Tommy..."

"Don't. You don't get to act like nothing's happened." He turned away, suddenly losing his appetite.

"We're both stuck with this until Kristin's better, you can't just pretend we don't exist," Wilbur said patiently. "It won't change anything."

"Fuck off."

"I'm trying to help."

"You're not helping anything," Tommy said as coldly as he could manage, turning his back.

"He's right, you're being overbearing." Techno walked in wearing a smart sweater, a travel cup in one hand, tossing his car keys in a bowl. "It's not like he's going to walk to the nearest Enforcer and out us."

"If you lifted his..." Tommy waved his hand at Wilbur. "Thing then maybe I could."

"Even then I know you won't tell anyone," Techno said confidently. "Because you can't. Not because we'd hurt you or Kristin because we won't, whether you believe that or not."

"Why then." Tommy challenged him, "What bullshit do I have to listen to today."

"Because you know they wouldn't believe you. And if they did believe you, you would be in danger by association, you know what they're like about the Syndicate." He filled his mug up at the kettle, making himself tea. "And before any of that, you'd have to get over your pride, and I don't think that's happening."

“What the fuck do you mean?”

“Because I haven’t known you for long but I know Tommy doesn’t ask for help, ever, he doesn’t accept help without a damn fight.” Techno turned, leaning down to look him in the eyes. “And he sure as hell wouldn’t admit that he might be wrong about something.” He held eye contact for a few, long seconds, and Tommy didn’t dare look away, all the wind taken out of his fight.

“Good day at work?” Wilbur tried

“It was bearable. Architects bore me.” He walked away whistling some kind of tune to himself without another word.

“That man is a psychopath.”

“Eh. He grows on you.” Wilbur spun the car keys around his finger. “Are we going?” He didn’t really have a choice. He picked himself up, snatching up his bag, taking as long as possible to pack his lunch away, trailing Wilbur outside to the car.

He kept his head down, not making eye contact, refusing to start any kind of conversation. He could feel Will’s eyes on him, but he wouldn’t give in, as much as he wanted to, he knew the silent treatment was much worse than any kind of anger or swearing or argument he took out on the other.

He took the aux cable, trying to plug his phone in as Will swerved around a corner. “Your driving is shit.” He said finally, unable to hold himself in any longer. Wilbur snatched the aux cable in response

“Mine now.” He managed to plug his phone in with one hand, the other on the wheel, one eye on the road, picking a song out at random, setting it back down again. Tommy snatched it back before it had barely landed, and so it went back and forth.

They spent most of the ride squabbling over it. It was so easy to slip back into old habits, so easy to yell the same old insults, so easy to just pretend nothing ever happened. For little snippets of time, everything was fine and normal, there was no weight in the tossed words, there was no hurt loaded behind them.

Wilbur’s face was flushed, eyes alight, just like the old times, but the conversation faltered and there was the darkness again. There was a tension in his shoulders, and Tommy’s, a manufactured wariness that never lifted.

As much as he’d never admit it, Tommy was afraid. At first glance, he saw Wilbur as he used to, chaotic and a little annoying, but endearing all the same. Now each assertive statement, each joking threat, felt real. He was beginning to draw the lines between Will and his persona, until the two became harder and harder to distinguish, each action however innocent had a new, sinister twist and he was faced with the cruel reality of sitting in a car with a villain wearing the face of a friend.

Maybe he could have worked through the betrayal if he had a chance, if he could distance himself from it all but that was never an option, he had to face it each and every day with no escape.

Ranboo was standing on the steps outside waiting for him, bag slung over one shoulder. Tommy couldn't get out of the car fast enough, not a word to Wilbur, no thanks, no goodbye, sprinting over. Ranboo read his expression immediately, brow furrowing in concern. "Is something the matter?"

"Can I have a word with you?" Wilbur trotted up behind them before Tommy could say anything

"Sure." Ranboo looked a little confused, glancing back at his friend for help, but he just shrugged helplessly. Will led him a little bit away, saying something to him, too quick and too quiet for Tommy to hear. There was a pause, and then they burst out laughing, Ranboo smiling and trotting back over, the other following.

"What did he want to talk about?" Tommy asked immediately. "Are you alright?"

"Yes? Why wouldn't I be." He got an odd look

"What did he say?"

"He said you had an argument. And then he was being weird, you know, in the way Wilbur does, said something about you being a bit off and not to worry about it." He said brightly.

"What were you laughing about?" Tommy pressed

"Oh. I said I couldn't imagine you arguing." Ranboo smiled slightly and then tilted his head. "Should I be worried about it?"

"No." The words came out of his mouth, but he hadn't wanted to say them. He wanted to scream, to beg Ranboo to help but his voice wouldn't cooperate. "Everything's fine. He didn't say anything else?"

Tommy narrowed his eyes. "Sure?"

The older boy sighed heavily. "Is it going to be one of those days?"

"What do you mean one of those days!"

"When you'll fight the first living thing that moves, normally me." He turned away, starting up the stairs and Tommy followed him, adopting an innocent expression, whistling to himself. "Don't know what you're talking about." The other boy just laughed.

There was a sense of relief as they entered the building, curdled by a new fear. He knew this place, and it's routines, it was structured and simple, it made sense, something that was more than welcome after the confusion and grief of the past week. This place was safe, in a way his home no longer was.

But the guilt settled deep, he felt eyes following him where there were none, as if one look would reveal what he was hiding, the words he couldn't say. He was paranoid, every noise, every cleared throat, every new voice made him jump, as if he was about to be discovered.

Every worst case scenario played through his mind, of being discovered, arrested, named as a Syndicate spy, being completely unable to defend himself.

“You’re very jumpy.” Ranboo asked curiously. “Are you alright?”

“Fine.” He lied. “Anything I need to know?”

He paused. “Well.”

“Spit it out.” He said impatiently.

“We’re getting assigned patrols together now. Warden said he can’t give us any more excuses to stay behind and we won’t accept another mentor so we’re patrol partners.” The words came out in a rush, Ranboo giving him a side eye to see his reaction as they headed into the changing rooms.

Tommy shrugged. “Fine by me.” Ranboo blinked, and then turned away, covering a slight smile. “What?”

“I-. Nothing.”

“No, tell me.” He demanded. “What were you thinking.”

“I don’t know. Didn’t expect you to just, be cool with it.” He admitted.

“Well, you’re my friend aren’t you?” Tommy said bluntly. “I’d say you’re tolerable.”

He burst out laughing. “You were close, you were so close. We were almost having a moment.”

“What, it’s a compliment.” He replied, offended. “I don’t find many people tolerable. You clearly tolerate me, what’s so weird about it.” He threw

“Of course, you’re my friend. You’re probably my best friend.” Ranboo said easily. “I don’t just tolerate you, I enjoy your company.”

“Sounds fake to me.” He took a sip of water, already wearing his undersuit under his clothes, yanking his hoodie on, strapping the chestplate over the top.

“When you’re not trying to hurt my feelings, at least,” Ranboo added after a little bit of thought

“That sounds more like it. What are we doing?” He clipped his gear into place, adjusting his mask, running through the usual checks.

“Short patrol to start, everyone’s on half patrols at the moment.” He explained. “District 13 and 14 only, stay off the main streets, avoid Enforcers.”

“Would they shoot us?”

“They not...supposed to.” He said carefully. “They’ve been told heroes are back out patrolling but you know. There’s no guarantees.”

They wandered out onto the street, in no particular rush. It was slowly getting busier, though the curfew wasn’t showing any sign of lifting any time soon more people were out and about on the streets before it.

Shops had reopened, the subway was running again, slowly but surely things were bouncing back to normal. The Enforcer presence had doubled though and showed no signs of decreasing, every street seemed to have at least one, gun in hand, rams skull glinting on their shoulders, faceless soldiers.

It began to empty rapidly as they entered District 13, the last few people streaming back into their houses as curfew drew closer. Tommy checked his watch. "Siren's going off soon."

"We should move off the streets." Void suggested. "I don't want to risk anything."

"I mean no one's out, nothing's happening." He said, bored. "And if anything does happen, we can get there in an instant. We can just sit down somewhere."

"There's an abandoned mall across from here." Void suggested. "We could go explore it."

Tommy hesitated. "I don't want the Warden to get mad at us."

"It's close enough to our patrol route I don't think anyone will mind." He dropped his voice. "And I want to talk to you about something." He said quietly. "And we should probably be away from people when we do it, that area has no signal so we won't be listened in on."

Theseus frowned. "Sounds suspicious. You're not going to kill me are you?"

"I can't stand on plants because I feel bad." He said, pained, "How on earth am I meant to kill you?"

"Kidnapping?"

"People would pay me to keep you." He joked

"Hey!" He stared at him. "Where the hell did that come from?"

The other meta ducked his head, a little guilty. "I'm sorry."

"Nah, it's kinda funny. Where we going bossman?" Tommy hopped from foot to foot.

"You picked that up from Tubbo."

Tommy rolled his eyes. "Yes and?"

"Nothing. This way." He led him down a small footpath between the houses, high fences rising on either side, brambles crawling across them. It led to a narrow footbridge over to District 14 on the other side of the river, a large gate blocking it off.

The looming outline of Pandora in the distance did nothing for his fears, the guilt only sitting deeper, eating away at him, Techno's words ringing in his head. He shook them aside, clambering up over the gate, jumping down onto a pile of wooden pallets. "This the place?"

Void nodded in affirmation. The parking lot was crumbling, weeds growing up through the cracks, covered with discarded trash, a newspaper tumbling across it, caught by the wind. The mall itself was boarded up, though some of the boards had been torn down at some point to make an entrance large enough for someone to get inside.

Ranboo made a beeline for it, pulling himself in, Tommy following him. His hoodie caught on a splinter, and he cursed quietly, freeing it and running after him to catch up.

It was quite small, lined with empty shops, either boarded or fronts painted over, some covered with graffiti. Broken glass littered the floor inside where the windows had been broken. He shifted some of it aside using his telekinesis so he didn't cut his hands, exploring the empty shelves for anything interesting but it had long been emptied of anything good.

A pile of rubbish bins had been stacked up inside one, along with a worn tent, no sign of an occupant. The elevators had rusted, trees sprouting in the dirt, growing up through cracked skylights, part of the roof caved in.

It left a circle of moonlight in the middle of the floor, Void standing under it, gazing up at the clouds. A wind picked up his cape, and it fluttered around his shoulders, strangely scenic in the rubble. There was an eerie silence, little more than the trickle of water and whistling wind.

"This place is kind of cool." He admitted finally.

"Thanks. I come here a lot." He watched the clouds skirt across the moon, lost in thought. "It's kind of my place. I mean it's not, but it is. I've never shown this to anyone else." He glanced over at Tommy. "Well, it's yours now too, I guess." There seemed to be a weight behind that, that held back any quick mocking retort that came to Tommy's mind

"I...appreciate that." He said at length.

"Who are you and what have you done with the real Theseus." Ranboo teased

"No, I'm serious." Tommy protested, wandering around a little aimlessly. "I am, I appreciate it."

"You're being sincere, it's unnerving me." Ranboo studied

"I don't know," He stared into one of the puddles. "You're one of the only people I have left."

"You have Kristin?" Void said, confused. "And Tubbo, and Wilbur and Techno, right?" Tommy stayed silent, and Ranboo's face softened behind the mask. "Are you alright?"

"Fine." He said automatically. "Just been a long week." He kicked a can across the floor, the clatter strangely loud in the echoing space. "District 14 is a shithole."

"I grew up here, you know," Ranboo told him.

"Oh. I'm sorry."

He laughed. "No, you're right, it's awful."

He kicked the can again, and it skidded across the floor, clattering down a drain pipe. A sort of greenish algae coated the floor to one side where a pipe had burst a long time ago, leaving a trickle of water, slippery underfoot. "Why did we come here?"

"Oh, yes. I wanted to talk to you." Void reached up, checking his earpiece was switched off. He sat down on the wall. "And I don't really know if I'm allowed to say this, so I wanted to make sure."

Tommy drew closer, intrigued. "Go on."

"So you know how I've been helping Puffy digitalise all the archives and everything?"

"Yeah?" Tommy perched on a slab of fallen concrete. "What about it?"

He was silent for a moment, thinking. "There was a CCTV camera that covered that area that you were in on the night Niki..." He trailed off. "Yeah, well there was one."

Tommy sat forward quickly. "What?"

"Don't get excited," Void said quickly. "The footage is gone."

"Gone?" He asked, bewildered. "What do you mean it's gone? What do you mean there was a camera in the first place, no one ever said anything about that?"

"Well, she was having me sort the evidence they'd been given out and there was a CCTV location looking over the place where it happened but no footage and I asked her where the footage was and she said it had been deleted before anyone could get to it, and they hadn't been able to retrieve it." He looked nervous, almost rambling. "And I don't know wh-..."

"Slow down." Tommy held his hand up. "Who deleted the footage?"

Ranboo scuffed his shoe across the dirt. "That's the thing. We don't know."

"Who had access to it?"

"Don't know. But it's gone."

He stared at the floor. "Syndicate covering up their tracks then."

"They don't have access to that." Ranboo disagreed. "Or there would be plenty of other footage they'd have deleted, right?"

"So...someone else knows what happened to her body. And they're not telling us."

Ranboo nodded. "Yeah. Pretty much."

He clenched his fist. "Goddamnit."

Chapter End Notes

Little shorter update, and possibly double update later, because it was too long for one chapter

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Only ashes remain (pt2)

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

The rest of the shift was quiet, but the new information crowded Tommy's mind. It was no use, neither of them had any kind of idea what to do with it but it stuck nonetheless. Ranboo was called away near the end to help with a fire on the other end of the city, but they didn't need him, so he headed back early.

Wilbur had texted him, asking him when his shift ended, but Tommy ignored it. The other option was walking home, the buses didn't run this late, not with curfew, but he decided to take the risk.

Techno's words about accepting help echoed in his head, but he dismissed them, refusing to acknowledge it at all. It wasn't help, it was a gilded prison as far as he cared. He stuck to the shadows, dodging Enforcer patrols. It took him nearly an hour, having to take all the back streets and long ways round to avoid being seen, but it was better than even a minute trapped in the front seat of Wilbur's car.

His phone buzzed in his pocket on the last hill. He pulled it out, breaking into a smile seeing Tubbo's contact. "Heyyyy."

"Hey." Tubbo's voice said cheerfully. "You should be asleep, it's late."

"Then why are you calling me?"

"Because...I assumed you were working and so wouldn't be asleep."

"You were right." He pushed his hair out of his eyes, readjusting his bag to be more comfortable. "How you doing?"

"Eh, you know. This and that. Worried about my bees actually, there's a storm coming in apparently."

"It's night, they'll be in their hives right?" He reassured him. "I'm sure they'll be fine."

"Thank you." Tubbo said absentmindedly. "You're a good friend."

Tommy snorted. "If you say so."

"I wish I was."

Tommy blinked, taken off guard. "Hey, don't say that." The other boy didn't reply. There was a splatter against his forehead and he held his hand out, the droplets catching in it. "Starting to rain."

"You should get inside." Tubbo suggested. "It's going to be heavy."

"Might have to run back to the house in time." He mused

"Wait, are you out walking? Tommy you could get shot!" Tubbo said, alarmed.

“Not in a hurry to get back.” He lingered at the bottom of the road, double checking for any Enforcers but they rarely patrolled in the richer areas of the city. He set off up the street, dragging his feet. “I told you I was staying at someone else's didn't I.”

“Yes, why?”

“Eh. Doesn't matter.” He slipped through the gate. “I'm nearly back so I'll call you later or something?”

“Yeah, sounds good. See ya.” He shut the call off, kicking his shoes aside, not caring where they went, or how much mud they tracked across the floor. Wilbur was leaning against the door to the lounge, watching him come in sadly.

“I was going to pick you up, I texted you to tell me when.”

“And I ignored it.” Tommy tossed his coat on the hook. “Deal with it.”

“Tommy...”

“I could kill you.” He didn't know where the words came from, but for a moment, he really felt like he meant them, instead of just being some old teasing threat like before. “I could fucking kill you right here and now.”

Wilbur smiled, he smiled, utterly devoid of humour but still a smile. “I know you wouldn't kill me.” There was no response. “I'm sorry.”

“For what.” He didn't even give him time to reply. “Cos there's a fucking bullet point list at this point, and there's no point apologising cos I know you'd do it again.”

“I would.” He leaned back almost casually, pushing his hands in his pockets. “I'd do it in a heartbeat.”

“You did this.” Tommy said coldly. “You did all of this, and now you fuck up my safety and my future just so you can have this twisted fucking parody of a brother that you wanted.”

“It's so much more than that.”

Tommy fixed him with a glare. “I'm not stupid. Don't treat me like it.”

“You could just join us.” His voice kept getting softer and softer, not just quieter, but gentler, more kind, some kind of desperation strung through it. Tommy hated how the guilt just pooled, crushing his chest. In that moment he almost wanted to run to him, to apologise, to play along and pretend nothing had happened and it would all be okay, just so Will wouldn't sound so alone.

“You know I can't do that.” He said instead

“It would be so much easier. You'd be safe, you're in constant danger at the Agency now.”

“And who's fault is that.” Tommy's voice cracked. “Cos it sure as hell wasn't mine.”

“We both kept secrets...”

“Kind of on different levels!”

“I can...”

“Stop. Stop pretending everything is fine, it won’t go back normal, it will never be normal again. You don’t get to act like I’ve forgiven you for any of it.” Tommy spat. “Because I haven’t, and I won’t.”

“I’m not asking for your forgiveness.” Wilbur insisted. “I know that I...”

“You don’t know shit. Orpheus killed my mentor, got Achilles to hold a sword to my friend’s throat, collapsed a roof on my head, I don’t really give a fuck how much I knew you as Will, or whatever you think we had.” Tommy hissed. “I’ve seen enough.”

“Tommy, we care!”

“It’s a shame caring isn’t the same as a moral backbone!” He didn’t give a damn if anyone could hear him, if Techno and Phil were home, or asleep, he didn’t think that far ahead

“I never wanted to hurt you, haven’t we shown you that enough?”

“I don’t know!” Tommy spat. “I don’t know, because on the one hand there’s the Wilbur that took me to the park two days ago and Techno who sat in my room reading his book to me and Phil who let me stay when I had nowhere else to go and on the other hand there’s Orpheus who.” He trailed off. “Fuck you, and Achilles who tried to kill me and Thanatos who appeared to be behind the explosion that nearly killed my mum! Can you understand why I might have a problem here, considering each and every one of you could put a fucking knife through my ribs before I got the chance to call for help.”

“We would never hurt you.” He repeated, as if he didn’t know what else to say

“You know what? You already have.”

Wilbur moved forward as if reaching out for him, and Tommy flinched back reflexively. A plate flew up from the table without him even thinking, slamming into the older boy’s temple, falling and shattering on the floor. Wilbur gritted his teeth, covering his eye with one hand, not saying anything, not making a sound.

“I didn’t mean...” Tommy trailed off, staring at the plate, and then turned his back, fleeing back out into the rain.

He didn’t really pay much attention to where he was running, following little footpaths and alleyways blindly, back into the city centre. He found himself by the Offline TV tower somehow, positioned just on the outskirts of the main city, wandering around it to find the fire escape that led all the way up to the roof, sitting back on the wall.

Only this time there was no Purpled being a smartass, no Spark to make fun of, an empty, Ranboo sized space by his shoulder. The clouds gathered over his head, the rain growing heavier by the minute. He raised his hand, and it parted to either side of him, keeping him dry.

His arm dropped to his side, and the makeshift umbrella faltered, dying out. He let himself sit there, droplets soaking into his clothes. They ran down his cheeks, hanging in his hair, the cold night air

searing his lungs but he didn't care. He felt so numb that the sting of the cold was a welcome relief, dragging him out of the haze he felt like he'd been walking in since the night before.

It was peaceful, as peaceful as Manberg got, the rain spreading out over the city in a grey haze, lit from below by shimmering white lights, splattering against windows and roads alike. Fewer cars, even fewer people, rushing through the puddles, a newspaper or bag or some an umbrella as some kind of protection against the weather.

For a moment, the world seemed so much bigger than the city he'd spent his life in. The storm overhead cared nothing for his problems, moving on past in its steady march across the night sky, towering clouds dwarfing one small boy at the top of a tower.

His phone rung, a sudden, sharp sound that cut through his thoughts. He watched it ring for a bit, the rain gathering on the screen in little droplets, lit up from below. He didn't feel like talking to Tubbo right now.

It ended, and then began to ring again, and again. He gave in, pressing the green button slowly, putting it on speaker. "Hullo?"

"Tommy?" It wasn't Tubbo's voice

"Hi mum."

"You weren't answering my messages, I was getting worried." She sounded tired, her voice laced with concern.

"Don't worry about me. Get some rest, I'm fine."

"Where are you, it sounds windy?" Tommy glanced down at the street far below. "Just a bit down the road." He lied. "Needed some space."

"You can't be out this late, especially not now."

"I don't even care at this point." He sunk his head into his hands. "I really don't."

"Tommy..."

"I'm fine."

She hesitated for a second. "Wilbur said you argued."

"Just ask Wilbur as you're clearly chatting." He snapped without thinking

"Tommy that's unfair." She said tiredly. "I'm not angry or anything, I don't know what happened, I just wanted to know if you were safe."

He put his head in his hands. "I'm sorry I didn't mean that."

"And from the way Wilbur's been acting he probably deserved it." She added, as an afterthought.

"Mum!"

She giggled, not sounding guilty in the slightest. “He’s sat in the kitchen with a cold compress over his eye, he was going to try and go out to look for you but I told him that was a terrible idea.”

“No shit.” Tommy stared at the horizon. “It was almost like I just told him I wanted nothing to do with him and he didn’t fucking listen to a word of it.”

“Oh angel. I’m so sorry.”

“Don’t apologise. It’s not your fault he’s being a dick.”

“I know, but I feel responsible for this. You wouldn’t be here if it wasn’t for me.”

“I thought you liked them.” He pointed out. “Changed your mind?”

“Toms I’m not here to have an argument.” She reminded him.

He put his head in his hands, rubbing his eyes. “I’m so tired of this. I can’t do this.”

“Come home. We’ll work it out.” She promised.

“How is this supposed to work out, exactly?” He asked. “Seriously?”

“Give it time.” She said softly. “Please.”

“I don’t need to give it time. Nothing will change, I can’t leave, I can’t do anything, Wilbur won’t listen to me.”

“Trust me, you know if I even got an inkling that it wasn’t safe you’d be far away from here in an instant.” She promised, and he could tell she meant it, but it just didn’t sink in

“They killed Niki. They’ve killed so many people, how do you expect me to just be okay with that.” The numbness was creeping back, it was easier just to not think, or feel, and he could blame it on the cold, the rain sunk deep into his clothes

“I don’t know what happened with Niki.” She said honestly. “I don’t know what they’re hiding, I know who they are, and that’s it. I wish I could give you answers, but Phil and I decided for all our safety it was better if we were kept in the dark. But there is more to them, I know there is, I can’t give you more than that.”

“So I didn’t get a say, so all of this is just some...blind faith?”

“I’ve worked in policing for a long time. I met many people, awful people, people you’d suspect and people you wouldn’t, ordinary people, I learned to recognise patterns. There’s rarely such thing as good people, but you can find the truly evil ones. They aren’t that, no matter what the media says.”

“Intuition, that’s it?” He said disbelievingly.

“There are other things going on, but I can’t tell you, in the same way you can’t tell anyone about this.” She said after a slight pause

“What?” Tommy sat up. “What did you just say?”

“Nothing.” She said, with an odd tone, “Don’t worry about it.” It was the same tone he’d had when telling Ranboo earlier he had

“What did he do...”

“It was my choice.” She assured him.

“You can’t even tell me?”

“Especially not you.” He opened his mouth but she was already anticipating it. “Please don’t take that the wrong way, I’m trying to protect you, there are things you can’t know yet. Something is going on in the city, something dangerous, I know you’ll get sucked into it, you have a sixth sense for danger and I want to keep that from happening for as long as I can. I’m sorry I’ve dragged you into all of this, I really am, it got so much more complicated than it was ever meant to but ironically, it’s the safest place in the city for us right now.”

Tommy rolled his eyes. “Yeah, I’d call living with Orpheus and Achilles safe.”

“Wilbur wouldn’t let anyone lay a hand on you.”

“I’m not sure how I feel about that.” He said honestly

“When I’m better...” She began

“We can leave, I know, Phil said, but only if you want to.” He said bitterly. “And I think I know who you’d choose.”

“You come first.” She didn’t hesitate. “You always come first, don’t ever doubt that for a minute. I can’t always explain why I do the things I do but trust that whatever I do, I’m doing it for you, if you want to leave then we will leave, regardless of whatever you think I might want.”

Tommy nodded quietly, tears welling up in his eyes. He wiped them away roughly. “I love you.”

“I love you more.” She whispered.

He took one last look around the rooftop. “I’ll see you in a bit.”

“See you soon.”

Chapter End Notes

Geek if you see this, this is your token for a cool space fact

Couldn't quite fit this into one chapter, so it's two :)

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The sun it does not cause us to grow (it is the rain that will strengthen your soul)

Chapter Notes

Title is from I Have Made Mistakes, by the Oh Hello's, which is the song for this chapter

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

“Morning.” Wilbur walked in with a shiny black eye, but still keeping it together. He managed a relatively cheerful greeting, and Tommy felt a slight curl of guilt settle in his stomach. “Tommy? You there?”

Tommy flinched away. Hurt flickered across the other’s expression, before he schooled it carefully, walking over to the stove. Techno walked in after him, looking a little sleepy, making himself cereal. He opened his mouth to ask Wilbur for something and then stopped, doing a double take. “What happened to your eye?”

Tommy looked down at the table, Wilbur suddenly finding a vested interest in the washing up. Techno’s head turned back and forth between them, like watching a tennis match, waiting for a response from either of them. “He was talking shit.” Tommy said finally.

“Understandable. No more questions.” He turned back to his breakfast without another word, retreating to the safety of the lounge to eat. Tommy turned away as much as possible, stirring his bowl without any appetite left, trying to pretend the other wasn’t there, the tension almost palpable in the air.

“I nearly forgot. Your mum said Eret was asking if you’d be around to help out today.” Techno appeared again, leaning against the door. He leapt out of his chair immediately, almost throwing his bowl on the floor at the chance for a way out, tossing it in the sink without looking back. He couldn’t get up the stairs quick enough, snatching up his things.

Techno reached his hand to stop him as he ran past the lounge, and then pulled it back quickly before Tommy even had the chance to register what he’d done. “Sorry, didn’t mean to alarm you.”

He just stared at him for a few seconds, completely taken aback by the simple gesture. Why was Achilles looking out for him? Why did Achilles, of all people seem to care, seem to notice what hurt, what scared him. “I just wanted to check if you had bus money before Will tries to drive you.” He moved on quickly before Tommy quite had time to process what he’d done.

“I-. I’m fine, I don’t need your money.”

Techno looked at him flatly. “You’re not walking, it’s pouring down with rain, so just enjoy the fact you’re stealing my money and let’s not argue.” He held his hand out, waiting for Tommy to make the

first move.

“There’s enough for lunch as well.” He prompted when the younger didn’t move. “I saw you didn’t take anything.”

Tommy glanced down at the coins, surprised at the thought. “Oh.” That did it, he reached out, taking the money, spilling it into his hand before his better judgement kicked in. “Thank you.”

Techno barely nodded in acknowledgement, disappearing again. Tommy pulled his shoes on at a considerably slower pace, trudging outside. Sure enough, it was pouring down. He found shelter in the bus stop, scanning the timetables for the route he needed.

The rain drummed on the metal roof, the sound near deafening. The bus appeared out of the haze, gusts of wind buffeting the rain back and forth. He saw the LED signs first, and then and then the rest of it, emerging out of the grey storm.

He couldn’t get on fast enough, finding himself a seat near the back. It was pretty empty but there were people again, things were starting to move as they drove into the city. Traffic had surged back, though it was nowhere near pre-attack levels, crowds of people visible on the streets again.

Everyone had just adjusted to this new life, eyes on the floor, keeping away from the new Enforcer patrols but continuing as normal. It was life, most people watched everything happen from the outside, it didn’t involve them at all. He felt like an outsider all of a sudden, sat in the middle of them with the knowledge they needed, but no way of telling anyone.

A large billboard was completely overtaken with anti-Syndicate warnings. ‘Run, hide, tell.’ Was emblazoned across it, switching to a direct line number for sightings or information. It switched to a newsreel of a very emotional subtitled reporter warning people not to approach the Syndicate at any cost.

It cut again, to a collection of candles and flowers outside St Mary’s, figures overlayed over it of the injured and dead. He looked away before he saw the numbers.

He stepped off the bus, dodging his way through the crowds. This was familiar, this was easy, he’d done this so many times. The feeling of eyes watching followed him still, leaving him constantly on edge. He risked a last glance over his shoulder as if he’d see someone following him, and regretted it almost as quickly.

The billboard had switched to fire, outlined against a dark sky, horribly familiar. He tore his eyes away, but it didn’t go, burned onto his eyelids. He clenched his fists, staring at his hands, trying to get the images out of his head, pushing it away. He slowed his breathing, counting in and out just as Niki had taught him, tightening his grip on his phone, keeping his head down.

The paranoia was starting to get to him, the noise and chatter of voices almost overwhelming. He turned another corner, stopping short. Orpheus’s mask was graffitied across the wall, throat cut open, red paint mimicking blood splattered all over it in some kind of gruesome statement. He stared at it, a hand rising to his throat, feeling sick to his stomach.

“Awful isn’t it.” An old man stopped behind him, shaking off his umbrella

“Yes.” Tommy agreed, “It is.”

“You’ve got nothing to worry about kid. Most people in this city will never even see one of ‘em.” Tommy said nothing, staring at it. He patted Tommy on the shoulder, moving on, leaving him transfixed. He didn’t know quite when it changed, but it wasn’t Orpheus’s mask anymore. All he could see was Wilbur, eyes glazed over, reaching out for him, and he wanted nothing more than to reach back.

Someone knocked into his shoulder, a blonde-haired woman carrying a basket of fresh fruit from the market, one hand protectively over a pomegranate to stop it spilling out. She barely looked at him, clearly in a hurry but it broke the eye contact, freeing him.

He stumbled away, his feet finding the way to Eret’s bookshop, ducking out of the rain, pushing the door open. The bell above it chimed, and he suddenly felt much better. Just being in the shop was a breath of fresh air.

A little bittersweet, but safe, as much as he complained about having to work there before. It felt like a lifetime since he’d last been here, before the ball, before Niki, before everything. A much younger, much more careless Tommy had been in here, back when Techno was nothing more than a frequent customer, Wilbur an unseen brother, Ranboo was a stranger.

It was pretty dark, only a few of the lights were on, a vacuum cleaner pulled into the middle of the floor. A shape moved in the doorway, and he raised a hand. “Hi Eret.”

“Hi.” The normally upbeat shop owner seemed a little subdued, running a tired hand through her hair, but she managed a smile for him. “Nice to see you.”

“Sorry I haven’t been in much lately.” He threw his bag down behind the till.

“That’s fine.” They waved him aside quickly. “No need to worry, I know you’ve had a lot going on.” There was a pause

“Is that a new dress?” He asked awkwardly, trying to make conversation. She was wearing a red skirt with gold butterflies embroidered all the way around, rising up from the hem to her belt.

“Mhm. Hand embroidered, I’m rather proud of it.” She spun around, the skirts opening up around her, and for a moment it was like the butterflies were circling around her, taking flight. He slowed, smoothing the skirts down. “Anyway. I’m sorry for the short notice.”

“That’s okay. I wanted to get out.” He looked around slowly. Everything seemed just as he left it, though with a tiny layer of dust from a week or so of evident disuse during the lockdown.

“Foolish went missing on the night of the attacks, I’ve been short-staffed ever since.” They explained. “It was fine while everything was closed but now things are reopening and I’m desperate.”

Tommy’s expression froze. “What?”

“I know. I haven’t had any luck in finding him, police won’t help, Enforcers laugh in my face but I can’t just close the shop and go looking for him.” They drew a hand tiredly over their eyes, pulling a box from behind the counter. “I just need some help restocking shelves and things, it’s too much for me alone but two pairs of hands makes it easier, if that’s alright?”

Tommy complied immediately, taking the box from him. “You know, if he went missing on that night...”

“I probably won’t find him. Or I won’t like what I find.” Eret finished for them. “I know, but I can’t help it.” She sighed, adjusting their scarf. “But it feels so helpless. I just want to feel like I’m doing something.”

“I’m...sorry. I don’t know what else to say.”

“It’s fine.” They shook their head. “Don’t worry about me, what will be, will be.”

“No it’s fine.” He said quickly. “I don’t mind.”

“You’ve got a lot on your mind already.” He tilted his head, watching him. “I can see that.”

Tommy rolled his eyes, beginning to sort the books into shelves, careful not to fold the covers. “You’re being weird. I’m fine.” He clambered back down, picking up another handful of novels, lost in thought.

They strode across the floor with a sudden intensity, reaching up and resting their hand on his temple before he could stop her. An odd look crossed their face, and for a moment he could have sworn their eyes clouded over, pupil and iris turning milky white.

“The world hasn’t been kind to you has it?” He heard their voice as if from a distance, echoing in his ears.

“No.” He heard himself say. “No, it hasn’t.”

“You’re a ghost of the boy I saw a few weeks ago.” It wasn’t pity in their voice, or any kind of judgement which he felt so very grateful for. He hated pity, he was tired of it, it had followed him around for weeks, with meaningless apologies and patronising side glances.

This was just a kind of sadness for him, an acknowledgment that it hurt from someone who’d suffered their own loss and been left scrambling to cope, no less of a person for it all.

The tension fell from his shoulders, muscles unknotting, a kind of calm falling over his mind. Maybe he would have been a little more concerned about that, but he couldn’t really find any reason to worry, the stress seeping from his mind completely. He swayed on his feet, and Eret steadied him, stepping back, blinking.

Their eyes were clear again, and he decided he must have imagined it, even as they winced in pain, pressing a hand to their head. They shook it aside, frowning before turning away. “I’m getting a new shipment in so I’ll be out the back, let me know if you need anything.”

“Will do.” He turned back to his work

Rain pattered against the windows, but it was cosy inside. He switched the lights on, and once the carpet had been vacuumed and the shelves dusted it started to look a little more like the shop he knew, life seeping back into it.

Time slid past easily, he almost missed his alarm, his phone going off in his pocket. He poked his head around the back-room door, Eret sorting out shelves, shoving a box into place with his shoulder, dusting his hands off.

“I need to go to work soon. Other work.”

“Alright, thank you.” They dusted their hands off, looking very relieved, “You’ve been a godsend.” They glanced out to check the weather quickly. It was still pouring down with rain, no sign of letting up. “Take care out there.”

“Will do.” He shouldered his bag, lingering in the doorway for a little while watching it fall, before dodging out onto the street, hopping from cover to cover. The further he went from the shop, the more all the stress came rushing back, but it was still easier than before, a weight lifted. He resolved to go back more often, it was the perfect excuse to get some time out.

The storm had eased a bit as he walked down from the bus stop, letting himself inside, pulling his raincoat off, shivering a little. He tossed his bag aside, shaking his hair out like a dog to get the water out, risking a foray into the lounge to hunt for his phone charger.

Techno was sat in the corner, some large book written in absurdly small print open in his hands, Wilbur on the opposite side, hunched over a laptop, a steaming mug in one hand. He glanced up at Tommy, taking in the soaking clothes and miserable expression.

“Want a warm drink or something.” He did, but he refused to accept one from Will, so he just shook his head, staying silent.

“I don’t think I’ve seen a more awkward room.”

Tommy spun around to see Kristin by the door, stood up and dressed, her bag in her hand, looking tired but somehow on her feet despite it. “You’re up!”

He leapt to his feet, running over, throwing his arms around her. She hugged him back, beaming. “Hello darling.”

“Are you going somewhere?” He asked, worried. “You shouldn’t be up yet, Phil said...”

“I’m alright, he’s fussing too much.” She said firmly. “We’re being very careful.” She promised. “It’s just to the pharmacy to pick up a prescription and then to a small diner afterwards. If I have to lie in bed a day longer I’ll go mad.”

“I’ll look after her, don’t worry,” Phil said, and she cast a fond look over her shoulder as he joined them.

“Speak of the devil.”

“We were going to go to a diner on the avenue that I wanted to show Kristin.” He said casually.
“Anyone coming with us?”

Wilbur raised his head and made direct eye contact with Tommy. “I promised I’d stay home tonight.” He said innocently. “Me and Tommy need to talk about some things.”

“I have reports to submit,” Techno muttered as he walked past. “Maybe on the weekend.”

“Tommy?”

“Uh... I’m not going on my own.” He panicked for a second, put on the spot.

“I mean we can call it off if you want to come along another time...” Phil began but Wilbur cut him off.

“No no, I think you should go. Kristin hasn’t been out for ages.”

“Is there something I’m missing?” Phil turned his head slowly, narrowing his eyes at them suspiciously.

“We want an evening without double parental supervision.” Wilbur lied easily. “What do you think?”

Phil relaxed, laughing. “Alright, that makes sense.”

Kristin perched on the edge of the sofa, brushing Tommy’s hair out of his eyes and giving him another quick hug. “Call me if you need me.” She said quietly. “I’ll only be ten minutes away.” Her eyes flickered up to the other two and then back again. “And maybe don’t murder anyone when I’m gone.”

“No promises.” He said stiffly.

“If you do, hide the body well.” She let him go, Phil holding an arm out for her to lean on. The door closed, and Tommy turned on Wilbur.

“What the hell was that about?”

Wilbur raised an eyebrow. “They’re going on a *date* .” He called out in a sing-song voice.

“You’re setting them up?” He asked, aghast.

“Of course.” He sat himself down on the sofa, looking unbearably smug. “Have you seen the way they look at each other? They were in love years ago, they clearly never stopped caring about each other.”

“I don’t know if you’ve forgotten, but she was the chief of police and he’s, you know, a supervillain and a terrorist.”

Wilbur shrugged. “And? Tommy if we were that obvious, we would have been arrested years ago, as far as anyone knows Dad is just a property investor with an interest in a community development project in District 13 and 14.”

“I’m not concerned about getting caught! I’m more concerned with the whole illegal activity, murdering people thing.”

“Boring.” Techno rumbled, not looking up. “More crime, less worrying about it.”

Tommy almost laughed. Almost.

“We could watch a movie.” Wilbur changed the subject quickly. He waved a disc cover at Tommy with a hopeful smile.

“I don’t want to be here.”

Wilbur’s face fell, and he sat back down, resigned. “Well. It was worth a try.”

“Don’t act like anything’s changed. I’m here for Kristin, nothing else.”

“What about everything before?” He tried. “Have you forgotten all that?”

“You just used it to get me on your side.” Tommy grabbed the blanket off the sofa, wrapping himself in it, refusing to even look at them.

“I didn’t know,” Wilbur promised. “I swear, I only realised after the bombing. I pretended I just realised you were a kid instead, everything was genuine, before and after, it always has been.”

“Don’t say that.”

“Say what.” Wilbur sat forward, facing him. “Say that it was real? That I, Wilbur Watson, a full and whole person, not just my Syndicate persona, genuinely cared about you.”

“Shut up.”

“Or is the part that bothers you that I, Orpheus, also have feelings and am capable of love and care, that I’m not just some villain you can punch into the ground, that I’m not easy to hate, that it’s not black and white, I’m not fully good or evil.” He pressed

“Wilbur stop!”

Wilbur’s gaze became almost burning with intensity, and try as he might, Tommy couldn’t look away, drawn in. “What’s the hard bit here, Theseus. That you are worthy of being loved, or that you might have to set your damn pride aside and admit you were wrong about us. Because if you’re really willing to throw everything away just for the words of an organisation that can’t even keep you safe, then I would like to know why.”

“I said stop!” A force slammed Wilbur back, throwing him into the couch.

Tommy froze, bracing for the retaliation, the silence hanging over the room for several, agonising seconds. Techno looked up from his book, bored. “You deserved that.”

“You’re supposed to be on my side,” Wilbur complained, not really meaning it, more wanting something to say

“I’m not going to pretend to be any good at this, but really.” He pushed his glasses up his nose a little, glaring at him. “You’re not going to convince him by not listening to him.”

“Thanks Techno,” Tommy mumbled, a little unwillingly, but no less genuine

Techno turned his head, studying Tommy over his book. “If he talks too much, hit him again.” He said flatly.

“Will do.”

Chapter End Notes

Tommy: Is stressed

Eret (an empath), sensing he needs help

[Join the Discord](#)

We have memes, theories, a denial cult, an open war over musical instruments and my random ramblings while I'm writing

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I update this per chapter that has a song attached to it, I have a channel explaining why I chose each one in the Discord if you're curious

It bends until it breaks

Chapter Notes

Song for this chapter is Way Down We Go, by Kaleo

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Tommy arrived at work early, desperate to avoid any kind of conversation with either of the brothers. He stood on one of the balconies overlooking the lobby, watching the Warden talk with Android quietly.

“Oh, he’s out.” Void appeared next to him, looking down over the balcony. “He hasn’t been out and about in days.”

“Huh?”

“He’s been locked up in his office, you hear him shouting sometimes but that’s it,” Ranboo told him.

“Should I be worried?”

He shrugged. “You tell me, you’ve known him longer.”

“It’s a bit weird.” He admitted. “But less considering what just happened, probably not that weird. I’d have a lot on my mind too.”

“Theseus.” He looked down to see the Warden looking straight up at him, making him jump. “Come down. I want a word.”

They shared looks. “What did you do?” Ranboo was faster.

“I haven’t done anything.” He replied, bewildered. “That I know of anyway.”

“Go on.” Void pushed him forward. He headed over slowly, dragging his feet

“You’re not in trouble.” The older hero sounded a little amused. “But you’re not patrolling tonight.”

“Huh?” He glanced over at his partner but got a blank look and a shrug in response.

“The president is delivering a speech tonight, I’m going to be there, and you’re coming with me.”

“Uh.” Tommy blinked. “Why?”

“Experience. And I understand you’re friends with the president’s son, he asked if you’d be there as I understand it. Void will continue on his own.” He informed them both. Tommy shot Ranboo a panicked side glance.

“Is Void able to come with us, he’s also friends with...Tobias.” He stopped short of using Tubbo’s nickname, realising the Warden wouldn’t recognise it.

“No. We don’t want to crowd it, I’m already stretching the rules by bringing you.”

“Why am I coming?” He pressed. “Why not the Captain or Android or something?”

“You need experience of these kinds of situations, you’ll see them a lot more when you’re older.” He said, not really elaborating much.

“When are we going?”

“Now, preferably, or whenever Void is willing to take us. Are you ready?” Tommy shook his head. The Warden put an armoured hand on his shoulder, kneeling down to get to his eye level. “You’ll be alright.” He said kindly. “Just don’t draw attention, and take the chance to look around. First impressions are key.”

“I think you really should take someone more prepared.” The eyes were settling on him again, the guilt, like he was about to be exposed at any second. The paranoia built, what if this was all a trap, what if they knew. It crawled up his neck, choking his breath.

“Something on your mind?” He asked. “You seem very nervous.”

“Nothing important,” Tommy replied quickly, a little too quickly but he didn’t seem to notice.

“Formality scares me.” He lied, surprising himself with how easily it came to him. The Warden just inclined his head.

“Understandable. I’m sure you’ll be fine, as confrontational as you can be-.” There was a warning look, tinged with enough mild amusement that it didn’t feel like a telling off. “I know you’re smart enough to handle this. It won’t be long, and we’ll leave as soon as the speeches are over.” He nodded, not sure what else he could do, the decisions had clearly all been made for him. “Void if you don’t mind.”

They reappeared in an empty room, all red carpets, and fancy wood furnishings, voices coming from behind a door next to them. Tubbo was stood to the side, lighting up when they appeared, Void waving to him before vanishing again. Tommy let out a long exhale. “Hi.”

“Hey.” Tubbo adjusted his suit, wandering over. “Hello Warden.”

The Warden inclined his head politely, moving past them, pushing the door open and holding it.

The room was filled with a mix of officials and staff, as well as people with press passes and cameras. Tommy picked at the sleeve of his bright red and white uniform, looking around at the sea of people in dull grey and black suits and ties. “I feel very out of place.”

“Yeah you look it.”

“Thanks.” Tubbo gave him a half-smile.

“You’re welcome.”

His hands were clammy, mouth bone dry as he walked into the lion's den, knowing full well he carried knowledge of the Syndicate some in there would kill to get hold of. The very idea of it left him shaking, more than he could dismiss as cold or nerves.

Every arm they brushed past was about to reach out and grab him, every eye that followed them in knew, he was sure of it. The butterflies started anew in his stomach, and he just wanted to run, claustrophobia starting to dig into his head.

"Where are you staying now?" Tubbo broke him out of the train of thought right before it began to spiral. "You said you were staying with someone but you didn't say who."

Tommy glanced around to make sure no one could overhear them before answering. "Phil Watson? I don't know if you know him, he's an architect."

"He's the one doing up city hall isn't he." Tommy nodded. "I've seen him around. He's a really good architect." He said thoughtfully. "Built quite a few things around the city in the last few years actually. Don't know much else about him."

No one paid them much attention, all eyes were on the Warden, a kind of underlying tension in the room, unspoken but not unnoticed.

"I'm sorry I didn't call you back," Tubbo said casually. "I meant to, but stuff happened and I couldn't."

"I mean, seeing you is better than a call at least."

"You could have told me you'd be here." Tubbo complained. "I wasn't even sure if you would be."

"The Warden didn't tell me shit until I turned up for my shift," Tommy explained. "He just said I wasn't patrolling tonight, no advance warning, and then we were here."

"Is he always like that?"

"Mostly. Void says the stress is getting to him though, he's never out of his office anymore apparently, and he shouts at things a lot." Tommy confided in him.

"Probably has a lot to do after all that's happened," Tubbo said diplomatically. "I don't blame him."

"Overworked and understaffed, the story of the Agency." He quipped, drawing a slight smile, but nothing more. "You look very distracted,"

"People," Tubbo said after a moment. "Not a fan."

"Agreed." An odd prickle of unease crawled over his skin. Under the shadow of the curtains an oddly familiar man in a blue jacket was watching him, his gaze piercing. He leaned over as inconspicuously as he could, tapping Tubbo's wrist. "Who's that?"

"Quackity." Tubbo followed his gaze. "Odd name, I know. He's one of my father's friends."

"He's staring at me." Tommy shivered, uncomfortable. "Why is he staring?"

“Maybe he’s a fan.”

“Oh fuck off.” He nudged him, earning himself an elbow in the ribs right back, but the shadows over Tubbo’s face didn’t lighten, something weighing the older boy down.

Tommy wandered off a little, trying to get a better look at him, Tubbo staying behind as he made his way over. There were reporters and members of Schlatt’s cabinet interwoven, talking amongst themselves, camera crews making final arrangements at the sides, cameras pointed towards a small stage at the back, lines of chairs being set out.

He got distracted watching them setup and lost his quarry for a moment, the blue blazer disappearing somewhere. Then he was stood right in front of him, Quackity appearing from behind a bookshelf. They studied each other for a moment, both seeming intrigued. “Hello Theseus.”

“Do I know you?”

Something like alarm flashed over Quackity’s face for barely an instant, quickly smoothed away by a practiced, showman’s smile, all confidence. “I don’t think we’ve ever met, actually, but it’s pleasure.” He held out his hand, and Tommy shook it, a little confused. “I’d love to hang around and chat, but I can’t I’m afraid, busy man.”

He flashed him another grin and then vanished into the huddle of people. Tommy watched him go, confused as he struck up a conversation with a group of reporters on the far side. Laughter rose, Quackity cracking some kind of joke, those around him relaxing effortlessly, leaning in to hear what he had to say.

A dark shadow fell over him, but he wasn’t paying any attention, watching him. “Hello Theseus.” A familiar, cold tone. Tommy raised his head slowly.

“Mr President.” His heart was pounding in his chest, cold sweat beading. He couldn’t make eye contact, as if raising his head a little more would pin him as a guilty man.

“I trust you’re enjoying yourself?” The lines were conversational, but there was something dangerous behind it all. “It isn’t often we get apprentices. You’re here to watch the speech?”

“You’re going to announce more meta restrictions, aren’t you?” He asked boldly, not quite knowing where the sudden burst of confidence came from.

Schlatt blinked, probably not used to people being so forward, but the confusion dissipated quickly. “Potentially. It’s nothing personal.” He answered. “When it comes to politics, I have to measure the wants of a few against the needs of the many.” He said coldly. “I’m sure you’ll understand.”

“No, but that’s probably why I’m not president.” The president huffed, a little amused, running a thoughtful hand over his beard.

“Quick on your feet I see.” He hummed thoughtfully to himself. “You know, your late mentor used to work for me.” He said conversationally. “While under the Agency’s shadow of course, but I could

offer you a better deal. A better salary, a safer position, in return for keeping my son safe.” The offer hung in the air between them, so tantalizingly out of reach

“Uh. I don’t know if I could just leave the Agency.” He managed.

“Loyalty is a good trait to have.” He swilled the wine around his glass, taking a sip. “But you could do well for yourself here. Your powers are unique, I can’t help but feel the Agency squanders you.”

“I have to think about it.” He stammered, “But thank you for the offer, I’m honoured.”

The president inclined his head, about to move away. “Oh, one last thing.” He turned back, the conversational tone gone from his voice. “If you do anything to my son, I can make sure you’ll never be heard of again.” He said softly. “Do you understand, Thomas?”

Tommy felt a cold chill crawl over his skin. “I understand sir,”

“Good.” And just like that, he was gone.

He turned away, badly shaken, seeking out Tubbo across the room for some kind of comfort. He was hidden off to the side, hovering near the curtains listening in on a conversation, and Tommy made a beeline for him, dropping in by his side.

There was a shuffling of feet and people began to fall in line, either disappearing out of the room or assembling themselves in chairs or behind the podium, checking over notes. Tubbo pulled him back to a sheltered corner to watch, with a good view of the stage.

“Your dad is terrifying.” He murmured into the other boy’s ear, watching the president stepped up onto the stage, the podium hung with the rams head seal, the lights dimming.

“You’re telling me,” Tubbo said softly. “I’m the one who has to live with him.” He gave him a side glance. “You’re still here so I’m guessing it went well.”

“I mean he blackmailed me with my real identity and said if anything happened to you no one would ever find my body,” Tommy whispered back

“Oh, he’s in a good mood then.” He said wryly. “But he didn’t kill you, so that’s a plus.”

“Not yet.”

“Shh.” Tubbo hushed him. “I’m trying to listen.”

“...In the next few days we’ll be reviewing the curfew to see if it’s still suitable for our needs.” He glanced down at his notes for a moment. I am sadly also here to announce the resignation of Commissioner Walters, who has led the police force through thick and thin for 3 years now. Her heroic actions on the night of the attack, placing herself in harm's way for her officers in a manner that went above and beyond the call of duty is a stellar example of everything that our law enforcement should be. However, due to injuries sustained she is no longer able to. She is recovering at home with family, and asks for privacy in this time.”

He paused for a moment, waiting for a scatter of polite applause from the gathered reporters.

“Speaking of heroes, once again I find myself in a position to congratulate the Agency on their speedy response time and aid in evacuating the hospital. Between them and our police force they took the brunt of the attack, and there may have been a very different outcome without them. That being said I have information that the Warden and other Agency leadership understandably be starting to feel the pressure of recent events. As such, I am proposing we send in units from our very own Enforcers to aid them, it's the least we can do.” Tommy inhaled sharply, but he didn't get time to say anything before the president continued

“All that aside, we must directly address the elephant in the room.” He straightened his suit, looking right into the camera. “I have not yet had a chance to speak plainly yet, so I will take that opportunity now. Let it be known that we will not live in fear of a faceless organisation that seeks to tear down the lives you have built with your own sweat and blood. I remind you all that we *must* stay vigilant. They have a stranglehold over our nation through nothing more than murder, cruelty, and fear tactics, but that will not last. When I spoke before in the aftermath of the attempt on my life at the Sponsors Ball, weeks ago, I promised action, and I promised change. I understand there may be citizens who feel I have not succeeded, that it happened again, and this time we did not escape unharmed. I hope to placate those fears, to remind you that we are strongest as a united front, and that this, as ever, is at the forefront of all our efforts going forward. Rest assured we will bring the perpetrators of this horrific act to justice, whoever, and wherever they may be.”

The Warden was staring into the distance, saying nothing, one hand wrapped around his trident. To an outsider he looked no different than usual, but there was an underlying tension, fist tightened, eyes narrowed in a way that set off alarm bells in Tommy's head.

“We know more now than we did then, and every day we are getting closer and closer to a major breakthrough. It might be tomorrow, it might be in months, but they cannot hide forever. The Syndicate is a sickness, and yet it's just a symptom of the wider plague that has hampered our efforts for societal progress since they first appeared, of the constant threat of unregulated metas on law-abiding citizens and the kind of havoc altered humans wreck when left unchecked. And like any sickness where we find it, we will eliminate it, by any means necessary. That is all.” He stepped down, giving a nod to the cameraman to signal he was done.

Another speaker stepped up, reeling off a quick introduction, but he barely heard them. The teleprompter in the corner lit up, it was off for the president, he spoke without notes, or prompts, but it was on now. Words began to flicker past, one after the other, meaningless to him. “What is that?”

“Names of confirmed dead,” Tubbo told him. It kept scrolling and scrolling. He looked away, sick to his stomach. It felt like it went on forever, a voice speaking but no words registering in his head. Another speaker replaced it, and another, he thought he heard the Warden's voice but none of it clicked. The TV cameras turned off, reporters getting the last few photos, but he was still staring at the ground, hand pressed to his throat.

“Theseus?” Tubbo prompted him quietly, “Are you there?”

“What the hell did you do?” He whispered.

“What are you talking about?”

“Why did Schlatt know what I said, about the Warden, about the Agency. You know what I mean.” He hissed

“Cos I told him.” The other boy didn’t hesitate. He didn’t break eye contact, eyes clasped behind his back, perfectly calm.

“You...Told him. Why did you tell him?”

“Because he asked.” He replied simply

“Why would you do that? You knew what he was going to use it for, it hurts all of us!”

“Are you really that naïve.” Tubbo interrupted.

“I’m sorry?”

“Are you that fucking naïve?” The older boy stuck his hands in his pockets. “Nothing’s going to change.” There was a kind of callous distance to his voice, no emotion at all, uncaring.

“What?”

“They find it all fun to watch for a bit, sure, heroes are cool and all, but they don’t care,” Tubbo told him. “No one cares. Do you think with all the people that have died at the Agency they’d let it go on if they cared? The deaths are part of the drama, they like watching it, they don’t give a damn, they aren’t interested in changing anything.”

“Niki wasn’t drama!” Tommy said, aghast.

“For them she was. It’s all a game to them, really.”

“She was a person. I am a person, not some piece in your fucking chess game!” Tubbo just shrugged indifferently, not looking at him.

“If you say so.”

“That was between you and me,” Tommy said disbelievingly. “I’ve never shared anything you’ve told me, I trusted you. Why would you do that?”

“I kept secrets for you so often, and you might never know how many.” Tubbo pushed his hands into his pockets, turning directly at him, his gaze never wavering. “There are things I can’t tell you, because they could get you killed, there are things I can’t tell you because they put my life at risk. I won’t pretend that I’m the good guy, but don’t tell me what I have and haven’t done for you.”

“Stop acting like I owe you shit for being friends with you.” Tommy snapped.

“That’s not what this is. And besides, did you really think after years of not being allowed contact with anyone he just decided that you, all of a sudden, of all people, would be fine?”

He blinked owlshly. “I don’t understand.”

“You really think I could just sneak out of this place, with all the security we had, that I could just walk around town in broad daylight and not get caught?” Tubbo continued.

Tommy felt his heart drop into his stomach. “You...”

“You’re almost endearingly naïve. You think you know everything there is to know about me?” He leaned on his hand. “Tommy Walters, there are things in this world much bigger than you.”

Tommy stared at him for a few, long seconds, something shattering in his chest. “Well fucking done Tubbo.” He breathed. “You’ve learned all his lessons.” He spat. “You’ve got the makings of a great president already.”

Tubbo turned away, raising his head. “Politics is politics, it’s a brutal play for survival with no room for heroes.” He looked towards the cameras, wearing a carefully manufactured cheerful expression. “Smile and wave Theseus. You’re playing the big game now.”

He just stared, numb to the bone. The ice sharpened in his chest, piercing his lungs, every breath ached. He dragged some cruel parody of a smile onto his face, waving at the cameras once before pulling away, away from Tubbo, away from all of it, stumbling towards the door. The Warden’s hand settled on his shoulder. “We’re done here.” He said quietly. Tommy didn’t respond. “Theseus? Are you alright?”

“Don’t-. Don’t feel too good.” The Warden glanced over, taking a better look at him.

“You look like you’ve seen a ghost.” His brow furrowed in concern. “Alright, you’ve done enough, Void can take you back.”

The words were ringing in his ears, as if very far away, he didn’t quite hear them. “But...” He trailed off, not quite knowing what his protest was.”

“You can’t patrol like this.” He said firmly. “Get some rest and something to eat.”

“Warden?” Void’s voice echoed from somewhere.

“Take him home.” He ordered. “Make sure he’s safe.”

A hand settled on his wrist gently, the only thing keeping him from crumbling where he stood. He barely noticed the teleport, swaying on his feet as they landed. Ranboo helped him sit down gently, lowering him to the ground. “Tommy? Tommy are you there?”

“Tubbo...” He trailed off. “He wasn’t a friend.”

Ranboo knelt down with him. “What do you mean?”

“He was trying to get information for Schlatt. Didn’t go very well, so he told me everything. He was using us.” He said numbly, staring at his hands.

“I’m so sorry.”

“Not your fault.” He replied automatically. “Don’t apologise. It’s fine, it’s fine.”

His communicator buzzed and Void glanced down, making a frustrated noise. “Goddamnit. They want me back, I still have patrol.” He said unwillingly. “Will you be okay?”

“I’ll be fine.” He clearly didn’t believe him, but there was nothing either of them could do.

“I’ll be back later.” He promised. “We can talk this out then. I’ll call, or something.”

“It’s okay. Don’t worry about it.”

Ranboo disappeared, and Tommy slumped forward. The fire burned in his head, the screaming and gunshots echoing in his ears. Names scrolled down a screen, the graffiti he’d seen earlier, Orpheus’s throat cut open. Foolish was gone, he didn’t know him well, he was just the friendly man who helped Eret out now and then but it was the first time someone he knew had gone missing.

It was here, he couldn’t run from it any longer. Schlatt’s words about protecting people, Tubbo mocking his naivety, a hundred discordant thoughts and voices crowding his head until it felt near bursting.

It began to sink in, bit by bit, the hopelessness of the situation he was in. There was no redeeming Wilbur, there was no hope for any of them, not after what they’d done. The betrayal, the lying, everything he thought he had and lost, it stopped hurting. He only felt numb, the shards of ice in his chest becoming a dead weight.

An idea was starting to form in his head, reckless and stupid but something had snapped. He couldn’t bring himself to care. Something had broken, all the anger had festered, his frustration and helplessness boiling over into something dark. He changed into his usual clothes, pulling on a pair of shoes, sticking his head out of the door to see if anyone was out there. He could hear their voices downstairs, the coast clear.

His feet were soundless on the floorboards, no sign of either of the brothers as he stole into Wilbur’s room, sneaking over to the shelf. He reached up, sliding the atlas aside, taking the pistol. The metal cold against his fingers, running his hand across the barrel, checking and double-checking it was unloaded before stuffing it in his pocket.

Two bullets lay on the shelf next to it. He grabbed them, slipping them into his pocket, pushing the atlas back carefully. It was a pitiful defence, one that would be useless against Techno to boot, but it was something.

He ran down the stairs, risking a glance into the lounge. Wilbur was sat in the corner, curled up under a blanket, looking comfortable, chatting with Techno happily. He lingered in the doorway long enough for Will to see him, and then bolted out the door.

There was a small common ground at the top of the hill, an open park, and wooded area, normally favoured by dog walkers, he’d seen plenty when he came up here with the Watsons. He hopped over the gate, making a beeline for the woods, straight to a fallen tree a little way in that Wilbur had shown him the previous week, sitting down on the trunk.

Silence fell, little more than the steady drip of water off leaves, the remains of the storm earlier in the day, and the rustle of the wind. It was far enough away from any houses that no one would hear a thing. He sat, and waited.

It didn't take all that long. Footsteps echoed behind him, twigs snapping underfoot, but he didn't look back. "Tommy?" He didn't answer. "Are you alright? You looked like you were crying."

"Go away, Will."

The older boy's hand settled on his shoulder and he slammed his elbow down on Wilbur's wrist, breaking his grip. Will cried out in pain, backing off, cradling his wrist and staring at him in shock. He pulled the gun from his waistband and loaded a bullet deftly, flicking off the safety catch. His hands were steadier than they had been all day as he raised it, aiming it right at the older boy's head.

"I could kill you right now." He whispered, "And they'd thank me."

Chapter End Notes

Y'all that were waiting for Ranboo to betray him, you fools, you nerds, you've been tricked, deceived, you've been bamboozled, y'all paid too much attention to the wrong member of the bench trio

Anyway. Might be a delay in updates as I have a long day tomorrow. It's fine, it's not like it's a cliffhanger or anything

[Join the Discord](#)

We have memes, theories, a denial cult, an open war over musical instruments and my random ramblings while I'm writing

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[Welcome Home Theseus spotify playlist](#)

I update this per chapter that has a song attached to it, I have a channel explaining why I chose each one in the Discord if you're curious

After the fall

Chapter Notes

I am so incredibly nervous for this chapter oh my god

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Wilbur barely hesitated. “Then do it.” He didn’t seem scared, he was completely relaxed, eyes were glowing with an almost insane light, looking down the barrel. “Do it.”

“You’re mad.”

“You could be a hero. Killing Orpheus, it would get you everything you ever wanted.”

“If I killed you the compulsion wouldn’t work anymore, I could tell them everything,” Tommy whispered. “This fucking nightmare would be over.”

“And then?” He was so calm, collected all of a sudden, his eyes never shifted from Tommy’s face. “What then? Can they really give you what you want?”

“The Warden...”

“...Is not the one waiting for you to come home.”

“Don’t pretend you care, I’m sick of it.” Tommy spat. “Same old recycled bullshit, it doesn’t change what you did to me, during or before I lived with you.” He could barely see Will anymore, Orpheus’s mask overlaid over his face.

“I’m not going to apologise for my actions.” He replied. “Just like you won’t apologise for yours, but please understand that that was never a lie.”

“How do I know what’s real.” He asked bleakly. “How can I ever trust anything you say again.”

“You can’t.” He tilted his head, looking at the gun. “You obviously don’t, but I mean it.”

“You don’t know me. You haven’t ever known me, you just found me annoying right up until you could use me.” Tommy stated.

Wilbur shook his head. “That’s not it. You were alright, sure, but I kind of just saw you as the child of the person my dad was friends with, you were just there, fun to talk to, but I learned a long time ago I couldn’t get close to people.” He shook his head, a far-away look in his eyes.

“On the night of the attack you stood over her screaming for me to back off, and I recognised you and I realised I’d underestimated you; you weren’t just some funny asshole of a kid, you cared, you really cared, you were brave. You earned my respect, it’s that simple, you were a kid in the middle of one of

the worst nights this city has ever seen and you stood over her and were ready to fight me, just like you were ready to fight me over Void. And when I looked back, like you did for Tsunami.”

“Don’t fucking say her name,”

“What, Niki?” He asked, not mocking or anything, just matter-of-fact. “That was her name wasn’t it.”

Tommy’s grip on the pistol tightened. “You have no right. You murdered her; you have no right.”

“Yeah, I shot her, with the gun you’re holding.” Wilbur said honestly. “Because she was about to kill Techno, and I told you when I showed you it, no one hurts my family. I didn’t know her; I knew nothing about her, I acted on instinct. If I hadn’t, one or neither of us would be here today, and maybe that would have been for the best, but it is what it is.” Tommy stared at it in horror, arms faltering as he stared at the weapon in his hands, and then raised it again, his resolve strengthening.

“You’ve murdered so many people and that’s your excuse.” He said bitterly. “You know I used to admire you.”

A slight smile flickered across Wilbur’s expression. “You’d be the first.”

“I looked up to you, I still held out hope for you even after everything!” His voice was breaking, tears streaming down his cheeks. “I should have done this ages ago.” His finger tightened on the trigger, aimed right at the older boy’s head.

But it wasn’t a monster that looked back at him. He didn’t know how an evil person was supposed to look, but it wasn’t that, It wasn’t Will, slightly red stained eyes, hands stuffed in his pockets, calmly looking down the barrel of a gun.

This was human, irrevocably and painfully human, and flawed and awful, he couldn’t see the parts he hated, just the person he loved once. His finger faltered on the trigger

“You don’t have it in you,” Wilbur said, not unkindly or mockingly, just matter of fact but somehow it hurt much worse that way. “I know you don’t, thank god you don’t. You don’t deserve that.”

“Don’t’ fucking tell me what I can and can’t do.”

“That’s not an insult.”

“I can’t even look at the death toll!” Tommy screamed. “I can’t even look at the videos of the hospital in flames, I can’t do it. What kind of monster are you! Don’t pretend that you care, I’ve seen it, I’ve seen it all, I know too much and you can’t ever take that from me!”

“Tommy that wasn’t us!”

The words broke out of him with a kind of aching desperation, like he’d been holding them back so hard it hurt, tearing from his throat. His eyes widened, realising what he’d said, covering his hand with his mouth. “You weren’t supposed to know that. Fuck.”

“What?”

“Forget that. I said nothing.” Wilbur’s voice rose with a kind of fear, the first time it had, and yet it was nothing to do with the loaded pistol pointed at his head. Tommy stared at him.

“What are you talking about?”

Wilbur couldn't meet his eyes. “Fuck this. I can’t do this.” He lifted his head. “No, no it wasn’t us. Sure, the Ball was us, I take full credit for that, it took so many hours to get that all in place. No one was going to get hurt, we knew that everyone would get out in time, there were heroes everywhere, it was a statement, a statement against the heroes, against Schlatt, against the people in power there. A hospital? One that helps metas? That wasn’t us.”

“There were apprentices at the ball, we clearly weren’t adults or involved, don’t try and bullshit me!”

“Don’t you remember? I told you to leave.” Wilbur reminded him. “Not because Schlatt was coming your way, that’s just what I told you, but because I wanted the kids out. I’m not lying, I was then, but I’m not now.”

Tommy’s eyes widened. “No. Don’t play your games, I’m tired of them, I’m tired!”

“Besides, we didn’t even know you were that young, they tell us you’re 17 or 18, I didn’t know.” He pressed, risking a step closer. Tommy staggered back, hands tightening on the gun. “I know it doesn’t make it any better but still, none of us knew. Besides, don’t you see what’s happening here?” He pushed. “Ten years ago, the Enforcers were barely anywhere, now the city is crawling with them. The mayor doesn’t want Enforcers around City Hall, he immediately gets voted out, Kristin nearly lost her job in the weeks before the hospital because she opposed them installing checkpoints around the city, the police resist takeover attempts, their stations are burned down and they tried to cover it up by blaming us for it. If it wasn’t for the video leak they’d have gotten away with it. You know what they did, why is it so hard to believe that someone did more?”

“Who else would have done that,” Tommy demanded. “You left a mask as a calling card and everything, don’t lie to me. Stop lying to me.”

“And when have we ever left calling cards!” Wilbur exclaimed. “That’s not our style, we don’t need to do that. We know the Enforcers were behind the police station fires, beyond that, we can’t say for certain. I knew they were bad but I didn’t know they were capable of that.”

“Who else targets innocent civilians!”

“We never targeted innocent civilians.” Wilbur snapped finally, a line in the sand. “Call me a monster if you want, call me a terrorist, don’t call me that. Every attack had a purpose, a target, they were statements, we kept as far away from civilians as possible, we always have!”

“Oh was Niki a statement then!” His hands were shaking again, and he couldn’t seem to stop them. “It was your people in the Enforcers, I’m not fooled. They murdered a whole police department just for information and you want to stand there and tell me you never hurt innocent people.”

“That wasn’t us,” Wilbur repeated. “They didn’t get killed for the information, they got killed because information leaked,” Wilbur explained. “They got killed because they knew things they shouldn’t and the Enforcers solved that problem, it had nothing to do with us.”

“You’re lying.”

“Why would I lie about this.” He stopped. “Actually, to be fair, there’s a very good reason I’d lie about it, but I’m not, and I know you have no reason to trust me, I’ve lied to you so many times, for so many reasons, but I am not the person you think I am.”

“I can’t trust you.” Tommy shrugged. “Simple as.”

He gestured at the gun. “I have nothing to lose, if you’re going to pull the trigger then I can at least try and give you as much of the truth as possible.”

“Don’t play the victim. You could just use your powers and this will all be over for me.” Tommy said bitterly

“I can’t out-talk a bullet. And I don’t want to. I can’t do that to you again.” A tear slid down his cheek and he wiped it away roughly. “Fuck. This is easy for Techno, this is easy for Phil, they can step back and distance themselves and let you believe they’re monsters, because that’s what you *have* to believe, if you knew anything else...that information is dangerous, they’d do anything to stop it getting out but I can’t do it, I just can’t.”

“I don’t understand you,” Tommy whispered. It was just screaming back and forth, the same old arguments, same old anger, and whatever Wilbur was trying to tell him, trying to find the right words to say.

“I know. I know. I’ve fucked up, I keep messing up, I’m trying and I know it’s not right and it’s completely selfish but I can’t bring myself to stop. I just want...”

“I don’t care what you want! You wanted a hero, I just wanted a brother!” He was nearly screaming now, but he didn’t care who heard. All the anger and anguish and grief he’d carried for weeks had a target and it was right in front of him

“Tommy that’s not true.” He tried.

“I don’t know that. I don’t know what you want from me.” The words burst out of his chest past clenched teeth. “What you ever wanted from me, that wasn’t just laughing at me, lying to me, and using me for your own fucked up agenda. How did you expect this to go huh, how long were you planning to lie to me while I was living in your own goddamn house, and you’re still lying to me now!”

“I never wanted to use you,” Wilbur said softly. “You can kick me to the curb, you can scream, you can shout, you pull that trigger, it won’t make it true, it won’t change the fact that I care.”

“Why?” Tears were streaming down his cheeks, and he couldn’t stop them. He wiped them away roughly, his outburst had taken everything he had left, voice breaking. “Why?”

Will had the audacity to shrug, staring down the barrel. “Just is.” He took a deep breath. “Listen, please. I couldn’t give less of a damn about Theseus.”

And the words were true, Tommy knew it deep down even if he couldn’t yet admit it. Wilbur never wavered, his eyes never shifted, there was a push of complete conviction and honesty behind it.

“I care about Tommy. Brave, stupid, naïve, kind, reckless Tommy.” He continued. “Tommy that hugged that giant polar bear Techno got and looked so happy, Tommy that sat in the kitchen with my brother and helped him cook, cos he doesn’t get many people to help him, I’m not allowed near a stove and Dad’s always busy, Tommy that came back to all my jokes as quickly as I could make them, Tommy that made Techno laugh, made him keep him finding reasons to go back to that bookstore, Tommy that saw me in full Syndicate gear, and told me to fuck myself when grown adults with guns didn’t have the courage to even look me in the eyes. I care about him.”

“Will...”

“I’m sorry for the way I treated you, I really am. I made an impulsive decision, and I saw you slipping through my fingers and I reacted totally for myself. I haven’t been kind or fair these last few days, I was selfish and reckless and I’m so *sorry*. Seeing you like this, it’s not what I ever would have wanted.”

He took another step forward, and this time Tommy didn’t back away.

“I know what it means to you, I know you’d die for the people you cared about, I’ve seen it whether you admit it or not,” Wilbur said flatly. “I don’t care what you think of me, I would rather you hated me and went off to live your life safe, far away from this family. I would rather see you despise me and live than you get dragged into the mess we made and suffer for it, because you and I both know I still haven’t told you everything, I can’t tell you everything.”

Tommy couldn’t tear his eyes away. There were no powers now, no masks, nothing, but he was hanging on every word Will said, the odd fire in the older boy’s eyes lending a conviction to his words that he really, truly wanted to believe. “What are you trying to tell me?”

“That it’s one of my worst fears, losing the people I love, and I know it’s not an excuse but goddamnit I was so scared.” He wiped his eyes roughly. “You know. I had a little brother once.”

Tommy opened his mouth, but no sound came out. It took him a minute to gather himself, taken off guard, the gun lowering. “You what?”

“You remind me of him, you remind me of him so much.” He took another step, within touching distance now, raising his hand slowly, no sudden movements, giving him time to move away if he wanted, but his feet were rooted in place. A hand settled on his shoulder, ever so gently and he leaned into it without really meaning to, a lifeline in the dark.

“I don’t-.”

“I made a mistake, and I saw myself losing you and history was just repeating itself in my head. I couldn’t lose you too, and in the process I nearly did, I was completely blind to how it was hurting you, it should never have taken this for me to realise and I’m so sorry. I really am. You don’t owe me your forgiveness, you don’t owe me anything, you don’t even have to believe me.”

With the words finally out in the open a weight seemed to lift off of him. Wilbur looked relieved, but also nearly broken, the mask finally shattered. The anger shrivelled in Tommy’s chest, replaced by exhaustion, and a kind of pity. Not even fully aware of what he was doing, he lowered the gun, a lump in his throat.

Will shook his head, putting a finger on his lips. "Don't say anything. Not yet. *I take it back*."

The pressure inside his skull lifted, something suddenly missing, a weight off his chest. He swayed on his feet, trying to push him away. "What did you do!" Wilbur met his gaze fully, sure of himself and whatever he'd just done.

"It's gone. You can tell anyone you want. You can tell your Warden, the Enforcers, anyone, you can go." There was a kind of pain in his eyes, but a kind of acceptance, like he'd been hanging onto something he knew he'd never have. "I'm not holding you to anything, this was never your mess to begin with."

"It's not that easy. I don't believe you."

"Then don't. I've done all I can."

He could run. He knew the way to the tower, it would be some time but he could get there, this would all be over. He gazed at the dark woods, the path folding out in front of him, he was nearly free of it all.

Then Wilbur held his arms out, some kind of desperate plea for what they'd once been, not asking him, or taking anything, just standing there and waiting, if he wanted to. He could run past, he could turn his back, it was so easy, it should be so easy.

But he fell into them without thinking, the two of them crashing together. The world spun and he needed an anchor of some kind, any kind, clinging onto him like he was dying, fingers digging into Wilbur's arms but he didn't let go.

"I've got you." Will dragged his hand up, pulling him closer. "I've got you."

"I don't even care what you have to say. I'm so tired." He buried his head in Will's jumper. "I'm tired of being scared and hating everything and not knowing what to do, I've had a fucking awful week and it's mostly your fault."

"I should have listened to them and left you alone; it would have been better for all of us."

"No. You just could have not been a dick about it, and started off with the explanations." Tommy muttered. "It's not hard. But just telling me who you were? Leaving me to guess and assume and lying to me about everything, leaving me scared for my fucking life? Fuck you for that."

"So...you believe me?" He asked quietly.

"I don't know." Tommy said frankly. "I don't know what to believe anymore. I'm just tired." His grip loosened around the gun finally, hanging from nerveless fingers.

He barely noticed it being taken gently out of his hands, he didn't resist as the chamber clicked open, the bullet spilling out onto the ground, trod into the dirt, the gun disappearing into a pocket that wasn't his.

He found his feet slowly, and enough strength to push him away. "Don't do that."

"I'm sorry." And it sounded genuine, it really did. "But I needed it, and you did too."

"Fuck you." And he meant it, he really did, but it wouldn't hold the weight it used to, as much as he tried. Wilbur drew in a deep lungful of air, relaxing completely, his breath mist in the air.

"I don't forgive you," Tommy said, before he could say anything

"Fair enough."

"You don't care?"

Wilbur just shrugged. "It's out of my hands now, you decide what happens next, if you call the Enforcers or if we talk again. But not tonight, you come to me whenever you're ready." He hesitated, and then decided to take a risk. "Truce, for now?"

"Truce." Tommy whispered. "Now get out."

"Tommy...."

"Get out." He said louder. "I don't want to see you right now." He hovered for a moment, half hoping Tommy would change his mind, but the younger didn't even look back.

"I'd do it again, you know." He called out.

"I know you would."

"I hate this."

"I do too, for different reasons though. I think mine are a bit more valid than yours." Tommy retorted. Will nodded quietly, ducking back under the branches and disappearing

Part of him wanted to call him back, to fall into him again and just pretend nothing ever happened. It hurt, it really hurt, and he didn't quite know why. His head was spinning, trying to pick apart everything he'd just heard and failing, the words ringing in his ears.

He slumped down, digging his hands into the dirt, letting it run through his fingers. Something felt hollow, like he'd lost something and at the same time, there was something else

Hope, stupid, reckless hope. It was a lie, it had to be a lie, but he couldn't help but hope. He didn't believe him, he couldn't, it made no sense, but it didn't abide by any kind of reason or sense. He stared in the direction Wilbur had left, the magnitude of what he'd done sinking in.

He let him go. Let him walk away with the gun and the bullets like it meant nothing to him, like it was an ordinary day and nothing had changed, nothing had broken, nothing was said. And somehow, he didn't seem to think he'd made the wrong choice.

Chapter End Notes

And so it begins

I just wanted to say thank you again, both to the people who've been here all the way and the people just arriving. I see y'all theorising, your comments, all of it, and it makes me so unbelievably excited, especially when I see people I recognise coming back again and again, it means the world to see people so invested in the narrative I'm telling, both here and in the discord. I read every single one, and they never fail to make my day. I can't wait to see what else you guys come up with.

There you go, that's your Eris Soulfirephoenix wholesome dosage for the day, I've worn my brain all out with that /j

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Piece by piece

Chapter Notes

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He sat there for quite a while, slumped against the tree trunk, the damp of the leaves sinking into his clothes but he didn't care. The wind stirred the leaves from time to time, droplets falling here and there but there was no more sign of rain, not that he would have moved if there was.

The heavy smell of wet earth hung in the air, mixed with the strange scent that always lingered after the rain, that he could never quite put a name to. The bark of the fallen tree was rough against his back, his breath hanging in the air.

Footsteps echoed behind him, but there was no one else out at this time of night. "Fuck off Wilbur."

"I'm not Wilbur." A deep voice answered him. He sat up, glancing over his shoulder. Techno was stood at the other side of the clearing hands in his pockets, expressionless.

"What are you doing here."

He just shrugged. "I don't know. I was told to check up on you, make sure you were safe."

"I'm not coming back." He snapped

"I thought that might be the case." He replied, unbothered. "Mind if I join you?"

"I'd rather be alone." He traced a pattern in the dirt with his fingertip, deliberately avoiding making eye contact of any kind

"And I'd really rather you weren't, seeing as you've been sat out here alone for half an hour already." He said bluntly. "And you will freeze."

"I'm not cold."

"I believe you." He clearly didn't, but he didn't push, sitting himself down on the floor far enough away to give him space but close enough to keep an eye on him. They sat in a kind of awkward silence for a little while, Techno waiting for Tommy to speak.

"I guess Will's snitched on me." He muttered, keeping a side-eye on him for his reaction

"Actually, he wouldn't tell us anything." Techno informed him. "He just ran in, mumbled something about you being up here, and about saying something he shouldn't, and hasn't really spoken since." He paused. "I assume you gave him a proper talking to because he looked a mess."

"I pointed a gun at him."

He nodded slowly. "That would do it."

Tommy risked a look over at him. "You're not...mad at me?"

Techno just shrugged. He looked at ease, tugging the end of his braid thoughtfully, completely unphased by what he'd just heard. "You didn't shoot him, which is good, I like my brother in one piece." He said, matter-of-fact. "He tends to complain a lot if he's not."

Tommy stared at him. "What?"

"If you had shot him, as much as I'd be angry at you for it, I would understand why." He said simply. Tommy opened his mouth and then shut it again, realising he didn't quite know what he wanted to say.

"What happened at the hospital?" He opted to be blunt, not that being subtle was really something he did. "What really happened?"

Understanding dawned across the other's face. "Ah. That's what he told you."

"It kind of slipped out. But I want to hear it from you." Tommy insisted.

"I don't know exactly what he told you, so I won't say anything just yet."

"Techno." He tried again, but his efforts were ignored.

"Hmm." Techno turned, admiring a fungus on the tree trunk. "Chanterelle, fascinating, I haven't seen much of it around this area."

"You're avoiding the question."

"Someone has to keep the family secrets." He replied dryly, pulling a flashlight out of his pocket to see it better. "Wilbur clearly isn't doing a good job of it."

"Please," Tommy was almost begging now. "I need to hear it from you."

"I'll have to talk with Will first, and Phil. Or you can tell me what he told you."

"If I tell you can lie," Tommy pointed out. "You can just agree with what he said. I want to hear it from you, in your own words, and see if you both say the same thing."

"I can't." He said simply. "I'm sorry, it's not personal, but we didn't survive as long as we have by throwing away secrets like Will has been."

"Fine. The hospital bomb, was that you?" Techno mulled over for a few seconds and then sighed

"No, no it wasn't, we don't attack innocents."

"Why were you there then?" He continued, hoping he could get him to slip up.

"Ah." He held up a hand, stopping him. "I've answered what I can. You need to ask Phil."

"I could run." Tommy threatened. "I could tell someone, don't you want me to know the truth? Don't you want me on your side?"

“You couldn’t tell anyone.”

Tommy smirked. “Yes, I can. Wilbur took the thing off.” He informed him with more than a little smugness. “I can tell whoever I want now.”

Techno lowered his head into his hand slowly. “For goodness sake Will, do you want us dead.” He addressed to the general area of the trees. They didn’t reply. “Like I said before, I know you won’t. Either because they won’t believe you, or you’re too prideful to ask for help, you get yourself into a hole and just keep digging and don’t know how to get out. And won’t ask for help either.”

“Fuck off, you don’t know shit about me.” Tommy snapped.

“Will’s exactly the same.” He replied simply.

“Why’s it so bad if I know? Don’t you want me to not think you’re that awful?”

Techno folded his arms, leaning back. “That was kind of the point, you weren’t supposed to understand why you shouldn’t know, but Wilbur has already talked too much.”

“Well, it’s too late now, why can’t you just tell me more.” Tommy pressed.

“Show me the handbook on how to discuss the political nuances of terrorism with your father’s possible girlfriend’s son who just so happens to be supporting the side of the dilemma that wants you dead, and I might be able to give you a better answer.” He said dryly. “There’s a reason I’m not the talker of the lot.”

“That’s probably the longest sentence I’ve heard you say,” Tommy admitted. “But you’re talking plenty now.”

“Hardly.”

“Please, I know enough now, I’m going to be nagging the others for this when I get back.”

“Then you can hear it when we get back.” He folded his arms, but he wasn’t going to get away with that so easily.

“Come on. It won’t make a difference now.”

“I said.”

“Please.”

“Fine.” Techno gave in with a huff. “We were backing up Lethe. We heard what was happening and had to get our infiltrator in safely, that’s all.” He kept it as short as possible, but it wasn’t enough. Tommy latched onto that immediately, sitting forward.

“Lethe’s an infiltrator? What do you mean by that?”

“And that is why I don’t do the talking.” Techno sounded a little frustrated, but only at himself. “No more questions kid, you talk so damn much I end up answering just to get you to be quiet.” There was

no real anger in his words, but Tommy fell silent anyway, looking away

“Why do they call you Achilles?” He asked finally. “You’re literally unstoppable, wasn’t Achilles supposed to have a weakness.”

“Oh, I do.” Techno’s mouth peaked into a small smile.

“What is it?”

He chuckled. “You’re not getting it from me that easily. I said no more questions.”

“I wouldn’t tell anyone.”

Techno studied him for a few moments, his eyes too piecing for Tommy’s liking. “No, I know.” He sat back. “One day you’ll know, and if you don’t, well then it never mattered anyway.”

“What’s that supposed to mean?” He didn’t answer

“You’re annoying me,” Tommy said, frustrated. “This isn’t hard, I can ask yes or no questions if it’s easier.”

“And I answered no.” He responded, staring up at the sky, calm and collected. “Is that hard to understand? Or do they not teach you two-letter words in hero school.”

“Low blow.” Tommy hissed. There was no response. “You know, it’s not all bad, being a hero. We’re making a difference.” Tommy insisted, not even knowing who he was trying to convince anymore. “It’s amazing, it really is, it can be hard because of what we have to work with but it’s amazing. We’re doing what we can, we’re proving metas can be trusted.” The words felt empty, Tubbo’s speech ringing in his head, taking all the conviction behind it.

“They’re using you.” Techno countered, almost sounding bored. “They’re letting you believe you’re the agents of change while convincing you that your only worth is to serve them, giving you no other choice but to work for them.”

He didn’t even look at him as he answered, busy following the clouds across the night sky, almost entranced by them. Tommy was struck by the strangeness of it all, the brutal villain that he knew, and this odd man with pink hair and a love of books sat in the dirt, who knew the names of fungi and watched the clouds.

“I’m not fighting about this with you.” Tommy shut him down, turning away. “I’ve had enough of that today.”

“And I’m not here to argue.”

“Could’ve fooled me.” They fell into silence. He dug his fingers into the dirt again, scattering it over the path, watching it fall and scatter

“You know, Phil knew the Warden once,” Techno said after a little while. He lifted his face to the wind, looking pensive. “A long time ago.”

“He did?” Tommy asked curiously

He nodded, leaning against the trunk. “Back when he was just Sam. Before the Agency, before Pandora, before all of this. Back when there were barely any of us.”

“What was he like? Did Phil ever say?”

That drew a bitter laugh, devoid of any kind of humour. “Oh, he was going to save the world. They all were.”

Tommy sniggered. “And look what happened to Phil.”

“Same end, different means. Right and wrong are never that simple.”

“Every villain is the hero of their own story.” Tommy parroted.

“And every hero is the villain of someone else’s. Now where does that leave us?”

He stared at the distant lights of the city, just visible through the trees. “I don’t know.”

There was a short pause, and then Techno rose to his feet abruptly. “I mean, you can stay out here all night and get cold if you want, or you can come back with me now.”

“I’m not going back in there,”

“You’ll have to sooner.” He said patiently.

“Shan’t.” Tommy retorted. “I’m going to become a hermit. Live in the woods.”

“You do that.” He turned, beginning to walk away. “Enjoy freezing to death I suppose.”

“You’ll be sad when I die,” Tommy called after him. “You’ll regret being a dick.”

“I’ll be sad,” Techno called back. “But it was hardly my fault.”

“Mum will be mad at you if I die.”

“Kristin knows you, I’m sure she’ll understand my side of the story completely.”

“Fuck you!”

He settled back, curling up tighter, determined to stay out of spite. But something had left with Techno. He was calmer now, the adrenaline rush had all faded, his thoughts were more ordered. The woods suddenly seemed very cold and empty, the darkness which had been calming before was oppressive now.

“Don’t go!” The words broke from his throat before he quite realised what he was saying. Techno came to an abrupt halt a little way away

“Well, why didn’t you just say so.”

“You’re not funny.” Tommy shot back.

“I’m stupid, you’re going to have to tell me exactly what you want.” Techno intoned, not looking back.

Tommy rolled his eyes. “I’m coming, just wait for me.” He scrambled to his feet, dusting the worst of the leaves and dirt off of him, running to catch up, trying to give him a wide berth, a weak pantomime of not caring. The elder shook his head, and then slid his jacket off, holding it out.

“I’m fine.” Techno didn’t move. “I said I’m fine. I’m not cold.” He repeated, louder. Still no reply. He shook it, insistent.

Tommy gave in with a loud sigh, really not putting up as much of a fight as he thought he was, sliding his hands into the sleeves. It settled on his shoulders, baggy but warm against his skin. He began to shiver slightly, starting to realise just how cold he was, the damp seeping through to his clothes.

He wrapped his arms around himself, trailing after Techno, just a few steps behind as they retraced their steps through the park, and down the street in total silence. He held the door open for him, locking it behind them both. Tommy eyed it uneasily, turning away. A weight dropped into his pocket, Techno moving past towards the kitchen, and he reached in, pulling out the keys.

“What?”

“I have a spare.” He tossed over his shoulder. “I don’t need that one. You should have been given a key to the house already actually, in case none of us are in.”

He blinked owlishly, staring at the tiny piece of metal in his hand, so much more than just a way in, somehow a sign of trust and some oddly bittersweet mark of this house, no longer just a place he was staying over for the night. He turned them over in his fingers. “You being nice to me isn’t going to make us friends.”

Techno stopped in his tracks, turning and leaning against the door. “Let me be clear, I’m not trying to be friends. Or brothers or whatever Wilbur comes up with. I don’t care.” He said firmly

“Then what are you doing?” Tommy asked suspiciously, kicking his shoes aside. “You just trying to earn my trust again?”

“Eh.” He shrugged indifferently. “Maybe? Not in the way you think. You deserve better than this, kid. Forgive me for not being the kind of person to leave you out in the cold clearly hurt and upset.” Something crossed his face for a second. “It really only takes the bare minimum to impress you doesn’t it.”

“Fuck off.” Was all he got in response. He smiled slightly, about to go back into the kitchen before stopping.

“Oh, and your friend arrived just before I left.” He added. “Ranboo?”

Tommy's eyes widened. He stuffed the keys back in his pocket, taking the stairs two at a time, not caring who heard him. He reached the top of the stairs, and paused, lingering outside Wilbur's door for a moment, before turning away, shoving his open. Ranboo was pacing back and forth, looking worried. He spun around as the door opened, opening his mouth, but he didn't get time to speak. Tommy crossed the room in a few strides, throwing his arms around him, burying his head in the older boy's shoulder, stopping him in his tracks.

"Oh." He said, taken aback. "So it's like, *bad* bad then."

"Shut up."

"Got it." He patted Tommy's shoulder awkwardly, kicking the door shut as his arms were pinned to his sides. "Is it bad enough that you'll actually talk about it, or not quite that bad?"

"I mean Tubbo was using us." He managed. "And other things, but I can't talk about the other things."

"Riiiiight." Ranboo said slowly. "That doesn't help me but if you're fine with that I guess. What happened with Tubbo?"

"I repeated what you said about the Warden. He told Schlatt, and Schlatt said it in that big speech the Warden dragged me along to watch, and when I confronted him about it he just made some comments about it being politics and how I was naïve to think he'd ever really be friends with us for any other reason." He explained. "It was shit, it's all shit. I hate everything, this has been an awful evening."

"Oh." Ranboo stared at the floor. "Well, that sucks." He processed that for a second. "Well, I wasn't there, I don't know what is happening." He admitted. "I don't even know if I'm surprised or anything, I need a minute."

"Fair enough." Tommy let go slowly, slumping down on the bed. "I don't get it. Why us? What could he even get from us?"

"We're his age, easy to make friends with I guess? Actually, probably you, he wanted to be friends with you, you're the one who could give him something." Ranboo pointed out.

"If you make a loud joke I swear to god," Tommy grumbled. "I'm not in the mood."

"That wasn't it. I'm nobody, you're probably the next person to lead the Agency, that's a decent amount of power even if no one takes us seriously." He reasoned. "And, well, yeah. You say a lot of stuff. I guess he was hoping he could get information on the Warden through us or something."

"Except the Warden doesn't tell us anything." He rubbed his eyes. "Why would he cut it off though. Wouldn't he try and keep up the lie for longer?"

"Who knows. That's all the smart thoughts I have for today." He said as light-heartedly as he could, but there was no response. "So I guess it's just you and me again." He prompted, trying to get something, anything out of him. A slight smile tugged at Tommy's mouth, a bit of his old self finally coming back.

"I need better friends."

“Oh come on!”

Chapter End Notes

WHT!bedrock bros my beloved

We're so close to 500 kudos on this fic, which is absolutely amazing and not something that I ever thought was possible, so thank you so much. I feel very strange asking this but if you like this fic, and would like to share it, promote, tell your friends, please do, it would mean so much to me, feel free to tag me on twitter or anything if you do. Appreciate y'all so much, and keep up the comments and the theories, they make my day <3

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Empathy isn't always enough

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

There was a strange atmosphere in the house the next day. He couldn't quite put his finger on it, a kind of tension but at the same time a kind of release. He wrapped a blanket around himself, trudging downstairs, following the sound of voices to the kitchen. He paused by the door, not really ready to face them, especially not this early in the morning.

"But what if..."

"Will, code names." Phil cut in, slightly muffled behind the door. "We're not going through this again."

He heard an exasperated sigh. "You know what I'm saying. Hestia's cover was nearly blown for heaven's sake, they could have killed her. If Atlas didn't..."

"Forget about Atlas." His father cut in. "He can look after himself."

"It's our responsibility!"

"Will you're clearly not in a great place to handle that responsibility right now," Phil said patiently. Tommy leaned closer, intrigued. "I think you and I both know that." There was a pause. "Don't roll your eyes at me."

"You don't like it, because you know he's right." Techno's voice joined.

"I'm fine, I swear." He protested.

"Go to sleep Will." Phil interrupted. "We'll talk about this when I get back, and when you've had some rest." His tone didn't leave any room for argument. Chairs shifted across the floor, and Tommy backed away from the door rapidly, starting to walk towards it as if he'd just arrived, almost colliding with a very sleepy Wilbur coming through the door, dodging out of the way. He blinked owlishly, dark circles under his eyes.

"Oh, hi Tommy." Tommy pointedly ignored him. "You made it back alright?" He just nodded

"Leave him alone Will." Phil appeared in the doorway, wearing a dark emerald suit, clearly about to go to work, a mug of tea in one hand. "Good morning."

"Morning." Tommy ducked past, trying not to make eye contact. Techno was sat on the counter in a comfortable jumper, wearing a pensive expression, Wilbur's chair left out in the middle of the floor.

"Will filled me in on what happened last night." Phil pulled a bag of oats out of the cupboard. "How are you doing?"

"Why do you care? You've barely said a word to me since I got here." He braced himself almost instinctively but Phil just sighed.

“I’ve been very busy with work. And it was...possible for us to stay more removed from the situation than Will was.” He said carefully. “Which isn’t a high bar, but it was for the best.”

“Having me think you were murderers was for the best?” He paused. “Which, by the way, I’m still not convinced you’re not.”

He set a pan down, pausing for a moment, looking much older all of a sudden. “I know, it sounds strange, and some of it was just paranoia, but believe me, there were people out there who would do anything to keep the information you have a secret.”

Tommy shrugged. “Great, more people who want me dead. I’m weirdly numb to that by now, for some reason.” He gave a pointed glare at Techno

“Tommy we never wanted you dead,” Techno said patiently.

“Could have fooled me.”

“We did fool you, actually.” He corrected, in the most unhelpful way possible

“Death would be better than whatever they’d do,” Phil said before they could escalate that conversation any further. “But let’s just not talk about that right now.”

“When will you ever talk about it.” Tommy snapped. “Or are you just going to keep clinging onto secrets and I have to find out what’s a lie as I go.”

“Whenever you’re ready to ask because you want to know, rather than to fight us on something, then I’ll be ready to answer.” He replied. “But right now, in the kindest way possible, I don’t want to hand secrets that could threaten my family to someone who is angry at us, whether that anger is right or not.”

Tommy opened his mouth to argue, and then shut it again. “Sure.”

“If I was angry at Kristin, if I believed she was a murderer, if I believed she could be responsible for crimes in the city, would you tell me all her secrets.” He explained. “You already know much more than we wanted. I do care about you, but I care for my sons as well.”

“I mean it’s not like you’ve really spoken to me at all.” Tommy said coldly. “Apart from to order Will to mind control me, and then to apologise for it. And then nothing else.”

“Again, that was for your safety as well, as much as you may not see that. I didn’t make that choice lightly.”

“Yeah I bet it was so hard for you.” He said sarcastically. His semi-conscious mind was giving him more confidence than he’d ever normally have, albeit with more than a little spitefulness. Phil leaned on his cane, turning around to face him, an odd expression on his face.

“With all due respect Tommy I haven’t led the Syndicate for this many years by making hasty decisions.”

There was no underlying threat of any kind, but Tommy couldn't help but feel put on the spot, a flash of something behind it all. It was completely different to Orpheus and Achilles, not sly words or brute strength, this was something else. For a moment the illusion was shattered, the tired, hardworking fatherly figure replaced by a glimpse of a darker, strategic mind, standing up straighter, a shadow seeming to fall behind him.

"He said it was easy for you and Techno to pretend to be monsters." Tommy said bitterly, watching him carefully. "I can see why."

"Would you have believed us if we told you we weren't?"

Tommy just shrugged. "I guess we'll never know."

"Good." Phil turned away, back to the pan. "Porridge?" He got a flat nod in response, nothing more. "I am sorry." He said after a bit. "I don't think we've really had many normal conversations, I haven't really got to know you like Will and Techno have," He said apologetically. "Which makes this harder than I'd like it to be."

"Don't see how it would make it easier."

He changed tactics. "What happened yesterday? They said you weren't in a good mood when you left but something went downhill very fast for you to be holding my son at gunpoint in a forest."

The last bit was a little dry, but didn't seem annoyed, which set him at considerable ease. Phil was many things, but he was much easier to read than Will, he may have been a little reserved but there weren't the same mood swings and extremes of emotion. It was like getting angry at a brick wall, everything just bounced off the endless patience he seemed to have, and it was hard to stay mad

"Just bad week. Got fucked over by a friend." Tommy said finally.

"It happens," Phil said, not unkindly. "It's not the end of the world, though it can feel like it. Is there any way you can talk it through with them, or is that it?"

"Considering he was basically using me for information, no," Tommy said flatly. "So, it's kind of a sensitive topic for me considering that keeps fucking happening to me." Again, targeted, again, dismissed.

"How would we have ever been able to use you for information." He asked. "You keep everything you do so secret, even after you knew we knew. Trying to get anything out of you is impossible, I had to fight to let you help us help Kristin, even if I wanted to get something from you about the Agency I wouldn't have been able."

"Besides, we don't need to force second-hand information from an apprentice, we have our own people in the Agency who will be able to give us far more reliable information," Wilbur added, wandering in to grab a drink he'd forgotten, trudging back towards the door. "It's not the answer you want to hear, but it's also probably the only way you'll believe us."

"Will," Phil said sharply. Techno shrugged, watching him go as if that was a completely normal thing to say and hadn't just badly shaken Tommy

"To be fair, everyone in that place knows we have people in there, it's not a secret, they just don't know who on the staff it is." Tommy stared at them both.

“No go on, keep telling me stuff.” He said, smiling slightly. “You should keep talking.”

Phil just shook his head, a little amused. “Some days I really wonder how we survived this long.” He said despairingly. He set down a bowl of porridge in front of Tommy, picking up his phone. “I should go, I’m already late. I’ll see you this evening.” He ducked out of the door, and Tommy watched him disappear

“Great talk, as always.” He said to his retreating back.

“He’s trying.” Techno rose to his defense immediately. “It’s a lot more complicated than you know, he has a lot on his mind. But he does care.”

“Whatever.”

“What happened with your friend? Do I have to beat anyone up?” He changed subjects quickly. Tommy was about to laugh but got a sudden feeling the other wasn’t entirely joking.

“I don’t know. It was going well. We were going to be best friends. He pinky promised.” He didn’t know quite why he told him that, but he did. He felt silly

“Pinky promising is for kids. I don’t imagine he planned to stick to it.” Techno said indifferently.

“I am a kid.” Tommy said defensively. “I don’t know if you noticed, it’s your brother’s favourite joke. And I don’t fucking trust easily, so it hurts.” The elder acknowledged the second part with a slightly apologetic tilt of his head.

“It’s still not really a joke.” He sighed. “Don’t have the energy for this. You going to the bookshop today?”

Tommy mulled it over. “Might as well. Don’t want to talk to Will. Or you.”

“Fair enough.” He got to his feet. “I’m going into town in a bit, so you can come with me if you want, or you can take the bus.”

“I’ll think about it.” He turned back to his bowl of porridge, making a point that the conversation was done, something the other looked more than happy to abide by.

He did end up catching the ride with Techno, sat in the back with his headphones in, ignoring the world, tossing a passing goodbye over his shoulder. The door slammed behind him, and he set off without looking back, following his usual path to the bookstore. There was a closed sign on the door, but the lights were on, Eret sat at the desk working. The door opened as he pushed it, looking around curiously. “Hey Eret.”

“Tommy!” They lit up, closing their laptop. Goose sat up from their lap with a yowl of protest, and he hushed the cat, picking her up and setting her down on the desk. “I was hoping I’d see you today.”

“What, got more work for me?” He threw his bag down.

“It’s nice to have company. But also yes.” They admitted. “I have good news though; I bought a label printer.”

“I thought you liked the handwritten ones?” He said, confused

They nodded sadly. “I do. But without Foolish I’m behind enough on work as it is, I’m just not able to do everything anymore.” He looked worn, the bruises under their eyes deeper than he’d ever seen them, clearly not sleeping much.

“Can’t you hire someone else?”

“I mean I’d be more than happy for you to come on full time but other than that I’m very selective about the people who work here.” They explained. “I’ve had some bad experiences and then never again.”

“Then why did you let me work here?”

They laughed. “Because Kristin asked me if I’d take you, and then you turned up with a resume that said “I’m fucking amazing” in the ‘why should I hire you’ section, and I was intrigued. It may have been a mistake but I can’t say I’ve regretted it all that much.”

“Don’t make fun of me, it worked!”

“So it did. Now.” They led him over to a table at the side. “I’ve set it up like this for now, the shop’s closed today while I reorganise, I’ll move it into the back rooms tomorrow but for now it saves us a walk.”

They pulled a fresh roll of labels, walking him through using the machine, printing a few practice labels, showing him how to load the ink and paper. It was easy to relax and just forget about everything. He didn’t seem to notice the concerned looks Eret gave him, filled with a kind of worried care he was blissfully unaware of, even as his breathing eased, the stress evaporating.

He notice the glaze that came over their expression every now and then, their pupils clouding, completely focused on his work, tongue sticking out of the side of his mouth as he ran through the steps, watching as it began to print a string of labels.

“There we go.” They ruffled Tommy’s hair. “You’re a natural.”

“Fuck off.” He ducked away, secretly pleased at the compliment. “I don’t want to be a natural at making stickers, that’s a shit thing to be a natural at.”

“But very helpful.” They peeled one off, reaching out and pressing it on Tommy’s nose, before fleeing to the other side of the shop, dodging out of the way of his lunge with a squeal of laughter.

“I’ll fucking kill you bitch!”

“You wouldn’t.” They called back, laughing, tossing their scarf over their shoulder. Tommy reached for the keyboard, about to type the rudest thing he could think of onto a sticker for revenge, only for it to make a spluttering noise, an error message showing up on the screen. Eret sighed. “Hold on, I’ll

grab another roll of stickers, I have some here.” They knelt down, digging through the boxes, Tommy grinning to himself.

They stopped suddenly, mid-opening a box. “Does something feel off to you?”

“No?” He said, confused. Eret rose to their feet slowly, frowning, turning on their heel, scanning the shop.

“The square’s empty. There should be people everywhere.” They moved towards the window. “That’s not right.”

“Huh?” Sure enough, the market was deserted, the stalls left with all their items.

There was a sudden knock on the back door. “Open up!”

“We’re closed today,” Eret called back. “I’m very sorry.”

“We have a warrant to search the premises.” They froze in place.

“For what?”

“We’re not at liberty to say. Open the door!”

“Tommy, get out of here.” She whispered urgently. “Now.”

“Hell no, I’m staying.”

“Tommy-.” She didn’t get any further. Enforcers burst through the door, masked and armed, trampling it beneath their feet. Eret backed away slowly, one hand thrown out in front of Tommy as they flooded in, raising their weapons, aimed right at the both of them. “There’s been some kind of misunderstanding.” They tried. “You’ve come to the wrong place.”

A fist slammed across the side of their face, and they staggered back, hand flying up to their eye. A masked Enforcer grabbed her arms, twisting them behind her brutally, she didn’t stand a chance.

She cried out in pain, but he didn’t stop, pinning her face down on the ground, forcing a white band onto their wrist, locking them in handcuffs. “You’re under arrest under the Meta-Human Control Act,” He snarled. “Your citizen rights have been suspended until further notice due to inaccurate registration. Do not try and resist, or we can and will respond with lethal force.”

“Eret?” Tommy backed away, panicked. It was every worst nightmare he’d ever had, every headline he’d seen on the news about meta raids, except it wasn’t him, it had never been him, it was never going to be him until it was. “What’s happening?”

“Put your hands where I can see them!” There was no point crying for help, no one in their right mind would come, and one wrong move and the Enforcer with a gun to Eret’s head would fire.

“There has to be some kind of misunderstanding.” He inched towards the door slowly, holding his hands up, clinging onto his phone like a lifeline. “I just work here?”

He typed out a message with one hand, trying not to look at it so he didn’t give the game away.

“Drop the phone!”

“I don’t...”

He gestured with his gun this time, finger tightening on the trigger, and Tommy knew well enough it wasn’t an idle threat. “Drop the phone.”

He pressed send, switching it off and dropping it to the ground as quickly as he could. “Gentlemen I’m sure we can come to an agreement over this.” He tried a winning smile, looking around desperately for some way out, or something to help him, trying to look non-threatening.

“On the ground, now!” He pointed the gun at Tommy.

“I have a license.” He managed, pointing at his pocket. “This is just some kind of misunderstanding.”

“I don’t care. You’re under arrest for assisting in the concealment of a meta or otherwise altered human.”

“He isn’t involved,” Eret said quickly. “He does work experience here once a week, he had no clue.”

They didn’t listen. His arm was twisted so hard his shoulder ached. A matching white band to Eret’s was fitted over his wrist, and a cold sensation crawled across his skin. He slumped down, suddenly weak as a kitten, a strange hollowness in his chest. He tried to reach for his powers, not even to use them, just to have them ready, summoning them to his hands. Red light appeared for a moment and then seeped away into the band, like it was sucked right from him. He felt drained and sick, heavily disorientated all of a sudden, like he’d been using his abilities for a while.

A steel-capped boot pushed into his ribs, pushing him over roughly, and an Enforcer mask stared down at him. “Yup, also a meta.” He confirmed. “Out like a fucking light at one little bracelet.”

There was cruel laughter over his head. He was yanked to his feet, barely able to stand, dragged across the carpet. There was crashing and banging, bookshelves thrown to the floor, carefully curated displays trodden by military boots as they began to ransack the place, searching through boxes and seizing any electronic device they could get their hands on. All Eret’s beautiful handiwork was torn apart in minutes.

Enforcers had surrounded the marketplace, a few braver souls watching from behind the barricades, waiting to return to the market. Their trucks were parked out the back, hidden away. He caught a passing glimpse of Eret being dragged into one, unconscious, head hanging to one side, blood tricking down their cheek before he was thrown into another unceremoniously, unable to stop his fall, shoulder slamming against the floor with a painful crunch.

The door slammed shut behind him with a damning ring of metal, bolt after bolt sliding into place, leaving him all alone in the cold darkness, still slightly stunned, completely and utterly helpless to stop anything that had just happened.

Chapter End Notes

I won't update today I said, you know, like a liar. Also thank you so much for everyone who's been boosting this, we're so close to 500 kudos now which is insane
Also damn Tommy really gotta stop getting role models in his life. It never ends well

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We have memes, theories, the home of the denial cult, art and my random ramblings while I'm writing

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Chapter 40

Chapter Notes

The song for this chapter is Unsteady, by X Ambassadors

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

He woke up suffocating, fabric pressing against his nose and mouth. He panicked, struggling blindly, gasping for air, managing to get the bag off somehow, tumbling onto the floor, his hands still cuffed together, just barely managing to slow his fall before he injured something.

The cell was almost completely empty apart from a metal bed covered with some kind of plastic mat that offered no real comfort, that he'd just been lying on. The walls were padded, the floor was plain concrete, there was no sign of Eret, or of anyone at all.

He'd never seen the inside of Pandora, he wondered if this is what it looked like. He curled up in a ball, trying to slow his breathing, huddling in the corner. It was freezing, but the goosebumps on his skin had nothing to do with the cold.

There was no way to keep track of time, no window, no clock, no sound. He didn't know how long he'd been here. His head was aching, and he was completely physically exhausted. The band around his wrist was warm against his skin now, almost uncomfortably so, a small blinking blue light on the side assuring it was on.

He couldn't even summon a drop of his powers, there was no lock on the inside of the door, and no way of getting help, his phone probably remained where he'd dropped it, somewhere in whatever remained of Eret's shop.

Just the thought made him feel sick. The shop had been a constant for years, the deal he'd struck with Kristin to go work in the Agency early, however much he'd complained about it, it was a big part of his life. It had just been starting to fill a void, and then it was all snatched out from under him. No one was looking for Foolish anymore. No one would look for Eret now.

There were more faces in his head, Ranboo stood waiting for him to come on patrol but no one would come, he'd never know what happened, Purpled and Spark sat on the roof of the OTV tower, talking about all the things they couldn't talk about anywhere else, if they ever did that again he didn't doubt his name would be on the list.

For a few moments he was back with Ranboo, messing around in the abandoned mall, and then he was back in the house, before everything went wrong, tucked under Wilbur's arm, sat in front of the television, the places he'd felt safest.

It was almost a relief, the fear of Pandora having followed him for so long, each and every day, that now it almost didn't feel as terrifying, it had happened so fast. The fear was almost paralyzing, now it

just was. All the same, he couldn't help but wonder how they'd feel if they knew they wouldn't see him again.

He felt himself let go of all of those memories, almost surprised at how easily he let it slip through his fingers as if he hadn't already accepted it was a happiness he wouldn't allow himself to have, a decision made long before he found out about the Syndicate, before all of this, the life of every meta knowing they were on borrowed time, no matter how safe they thought they were.

He leaned his head back against the wall, too tired to cry, eyes misted over.

"Open the door." A voice snapped from outside, making him jump, breaking him out of his spiralling train of thought. "I won't ask twice."

"You don't have that kind of authority."

"I've already had this discussion with your superior, I'm not having it again." There was a quick, muffled exchange, and then the locks clicked open, sliding aside to reveal none other than a furious-looking Kristin, though the fury melted immediately into concern when she saw him, curled up in the corner, eyes-stained red.

"Tommy!" She ran over, kneeling down next to him.

"Ma'am I..." She glared at the police officer who walked in behind her, the other voice he heard outside the door, and he shut his mouth.

"Hand." He held it out without thinking, and she took his wrist, snapping her fingers. The officer scanned a card over the suppression bracelet and it clicked open, falling away. He swayed on his feet, the icy feeling that had set into his bones evaporating, leaving behind a lingering cold that wouldn't quite shift.

"I tried to..."

She cut him off with a quick shake of her head, helping him to his feet, one hand on his shoulder. "We'll talk on the way back, okay? Let's get you out of here."

"Wait what?" He blinked owlishly. "Is Eret coming?"

"Not now, we need to go." She said urgently

"Please, can we help Eret?"

"I'm sorry sweetheart, but it's too late for them." She settled an arm around his shoulder, guiding him out while he was still stunned from what she'd said, pulling her coat around him to shield him slightly from anyone they walked past, keeping up a quick pace.

"What do you mean it's too late." He pushed back, trying to get her to look at him.

"They took him to Pandora three hours ago," Kristin told him as gently as he could. "There's nothing we can do."

All the fight went out of him, his shoulders going limp. “For real?” He knew, he already knew, but the confirmation nearly took his feet out from under him. Eret was as good as dead, and he never even got the chance to say goodbye.

“The only reason you weren’t sent off with them is because of your license, and because the Warden intervened. I’m so sorry.”

“How did the Warden know?” Tommy asked, confused. “Did they tell him? Is he mad?”

“I told him what had happened, he was the first person I went to, he told me where they were holding you,” Kristin explained. “And no, he’s not mad, it wasn’t your fault.”

“I could have done something.”

“No, you couldn’t have.” They passed by rows of cells, but whenever he tried to look she pulled her coat a little tighter, hiding it away from him. “The person in charge of the facility right now is an old friend of mine.” She explained. “But shifts are changing soon, and I can’t guarantee the next one will let me get away with this.”

“How did you...”

“I’ll explain outside.” She promised

“You won’t get in trouble for this?”

She paused for a moment, glancing down with a slight smile. “Well, once it could have lost me my job, but I don’t work here anymore.” She gave the receptionist a wave, and a smile, striding out like it was nothing.

They stepped out into a dark parking lot, and she let him free a little from the coat, wincing, pressing a hand on her shoulder.

“Are you alright?” She nodded, clearly in pain, eyes squeezed shut. Tommy took her hand, holding it in his, concerned. “You shouldn’t have done that. You’re overdoing it.”

“I’ll be alright. Come on, Phil’s waiting for us.” She wiped her eyes quickly, setting off again towards the far side of the empty car park. Phil was leaning against his car, visible relief on his face as he saw Tommy.

“You got him.”

“Have faith in me.” She said lightly. “I know what I’m doing.”

“Are you alright?” He addressed Tommy first, one concerned eye on her. Tommy didn’t answer, not really knowing what to say.

“Give him a minute,” Kristin said for him. Phil held the car door open for him and he slid inside, leaning against the window, yanking his seatbelt in place. She turned in her seat as much as her injuries allowed, reaching out to hold his hand, Tommy clinging onto it like a lifeline, head spinning

“What happened? I got the text.” She held up her phone, nothing more on the screen than ‘Enforcers, help’. “You showed them your license?”

Tommy nodded. “First thing I tried to do, but they were accusing me of helping them hide, I didn’t know! I swear I didn’t know.”

“Neither of us knew.” She ran her thumb over his hand, trying to comfort him. “It’s alright, you’re safe now.”

He couldn’t even stop himself anymore, tears sliding down his cheeks, resting his head on Kristin’s shoulder. “First Niki, then you got hurt, and now Eret’s gone. Why does this keep happening to me?”

“I’m alright now.” The edge of pain in her voice lent a bit of a lie to that, but it didn’t really matter.

“Niki’s not. Niki’s dead! And Eret, Eret’s in Pandora now, and they didn’t do anything wrong.”

“We’ll get back home, alright, we’ll sort this out there, are you alright with that?”

“Don’t call it home.” He said automatically. “Home’s fucking gone, Enforcers burned it down.”

“Give it time.”

“That’s all you ever say.”

“I don’t know what else I can do, even if I wanted to.” She said sadly. “I wish I could help more, or say something that could make any of this right, but I don’t know what to say

He stared at his hands. “They were going to put me in Pandora.” He didn’t realise he’d said it out loud until the other two exchanged looks.

“Worst came to worst we would have ensured your escape before you got anywhere near those gates,” Phil assured him with complete conviction. “Pandora may be inescapable but an Enforcer truck isn’t.”

“Yeah, and fucking exposed I was with you.”

“If they put you in Pandora you’d be doomed either way.” He pointed out. “Trust me, you’d rather be on the run than be there.”

“What would you know?”

He looked troubled. “Far more than I’d like to.”

“Everything’s happening very fast. I thought it was over.” Kristin said nothing, squeezing his hand in silent support, a little at loss for what to do, just trying to keep him company as best she could. He stared blankly out of the window, watching the street lights flash by one by one.

Wilbur was waiting outside the house for them, completely not dressed for the cold, but there anyway and clearly had been for a while, shivering slightly, a blanket pulled around his shoulders. Tommy stumbled out of the car, the gravel unnaturally loud beneath his feet, everything sounded loud after hours in that sealed room, the low rumble of the car ringing in his ears.

“Of all the people to get arrested I thought it would be one of us.” Wilbur tried a half smile, but Tommy didn’t have the energy to respond.

“Wilbur, not tonight.” Kristin said a little reproachfully. He accepted that with an incline of his head, giving Tommy a careful once over, just making sure he was alright as they headed inside. He started walking towards the stairs to return to his room or something, and Tommy suddenly spurred into motion, not quite sure what by.

He pushed past Phil, falling into Will’s side before he quite knew what he was doing. The older boy caught him instinctively, staring at him, eyes very bright all of a sudden. “Tommy?”

“Didn’t think I was going to see you again.” He mumbled into his shirt. “Didn’t...” He couldn’t finish the sentence.

“Oh Toms.” He returned the hug very carefully, as if he’d fall through his fingers, both parents retreating into the kitchen for a moment to give them space. “I’ve got you.” Tommy folded, sinking down against the wall but Will didn’t let go, sitting down with him.

“I’m sorry.” He blurted out. “I didn’t mean it.”

“You don’t have to be sorry. You did nothing wrong.” Will pulled his blanket over, wrapping him up in it as best he could. “What didn’t you mean?”

“I don’t hate you.”

He didn’t see the tears in Will’s eyes. “Do you want to talk to Kristin? I don’t know if...”

“Not yet. She doesn’t get it. She wants to help but she doesn’t get...”

“Pandora.” There was a mutual understanding, one that had been missing for a while. “I know, Phil’s the same. It’s not his fault, it’s just different when you have to live with it. He tries to understand, and to be fair he’d be in Pandora too if we ever got caught but it’s not the same for hybrids.”

“What?” Tommy sat up, Will’s words dimly registering in his head.

“Don’t worry about it.” He said quickly. “Oh and Techno said he’ll be back soon.”

“Where was he?”

“He was...on standby if Kristin’s method didn’t work,” Will admitted. “We weren’t going to leave you in there.”

Something about that didn’t sit right with him, but not much, nowhere near what it once would have been. The words reassured him more than they should have, no matter how insane the idea of attacking the Enforcers in one of the places they felt strongest was, the idea that all that time he’d sat in the cell, scared and alone, they would have risked their lives to get him out healed something small.

Wilbur’s arms tightened around him, almost in confirmation of that promise.

“Are you alright?” He didn’t answer. “I know, it’s a stupid question, but it’s a good place to start.”

He sniffed. “They destroyed the bookshop. That’s where I met Techno.”

“I know. He likes to tell that story.” Wilbur said thoughtfully.

“He does?” Tommy looked up at him through the folds of the blanket.”

“Called you Theseus, cos you fell off a ladder.” Wilbur was smiling fondly. “That one?”

He couldn’t stop an answering smile, ducking his head. “Yeah, whatever. I called him a nerd for it.”

“I remember that. He came home very confused, said it was the strangest customer service he’d ever gotten.”

“That’s me. Strange customer service.” He didn’t even quite know what he was saying, but the knot in his chest was easing without him even really thinking about it.

“Was that before you chose your name, or after?” Will asked curiously. “Because it’s a very funny coincidence.”

“I thought it sounded cool.” He protested. “Fuck off.”

Wilbur’s eyes lit up. “Really?”

“I named me.” He complained. “He just helped. What about it?”

“I think it’s sweet.” He teased gently

“It’s not fucking sweet.” He shoved him, but the fond smile didn’t shift.

“If you say so.” He leaned his head on top of Tommy’s. “I believe you.”

“Fuck you.” There was no weight behind it though. He sat there for a little while, the warmth of the blanket, and of Wilbur next to him starting to chase away the cold the bracelet had left, leaving behind pure exhaustion.

He pulled away finally, untangling himself from the blanket, Wilbur letting him go, albeit unwillingly.

“I wanna be alone.”

“Are you sure?” And it wasn’t just Wilbur being clingy or not knowing when to stop this time, it was a genuine offer, which made it all so much harder. Tommy’s eyes welled up all over again, not looking at him.

“I don’t know.”

“Do you want me to stay?” He offered gently. “Or I can ask Techno if he’ll read in your armchair or something if you don’t want me there.”

“I...” He trailed off. “Please stay.”

“Are you sure? I’m sure Kristin wouldn’t mind.” Tommy just hung onto his sleeve. Will mulled it over for a second, mind already half made up. “Go get cleaned up, you’ll feel better.” He promised. “I’ll go get a book, like we used to.”

He hung onto Wilbur’s sleeve, and the older boy looked back questioningly. “Nothing’s changed.” He said. It wasn’t a lie, but it felt like one, somehow.

“I know. We still need to talk, and if at any point you don’t want me there, I’ll go.” He replied plainly. “But you shouldn’t have to be alone.”

Wilbur wasn't wrong, he did feel better after a long shower, wearing clean pyjamas, the salt stains cleaned from his face. Will had left his favourite hoodie on the radiator, so it was all warm when he put it on. It was a tiny gesture, but the thought meant so much more. He was sat in the corner on the armchair in the corner, in a dim pool of light cast by the lamp, carefully angled away so it wouldn't disturb Tommy.

"Techno's back." Will told him quietly. "He poked his head in. I said you probably weren't up to people right now but I'd let you know."

Tommy just nodded. It was just like it had been for a moment when one of the brothers would just sit in his room, back in the first week, and they'd talk, but neither of them quite felt like talking this time.

Still, the echoes remained, but they'd started to feel safer again instead of just bittersweet. He took a little bit of comfort in that, sinking down into his bed and curling up, Orpheus watching over him diligently.

Chapter End Notes

Thinking about the lyrics in Unsteady where it says, "cause this house don't feel like a home" and "Dad, I know you're trying, to fight when you feel like flying. " So yeah I heard this like 20 minutes before i finished writing the chapter and decided I had to put it on

Anyway, crimeboys anyone?

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Time heals, but some things never do

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

He woke suddenly, throwing the blankets off himself, dragging in air. His eyes stung, like he'd been crying in his sleep, his throat dry.

Will had dozed off, curled up in the armchair. He couldn't really blame him, he looked just as exhausted as Tommy had been. The lamp was still warm, so it was recent, he'd stayed up nearly the whole night keeping watch, even though he must have been bone tired.

He lingered for a moment, playing with the idea of stealing his blanket or something to annoy him when he woke up, but then decided to leave it be, creeping downstairs. The radio was on in the kitchen, faint light coming through a crack in the door. Phil was sat at the table in silence, hands folded in front of him.

He glanced up as the door slid open, startled, before recognising him. "Can't sleep?" Tommy shook his head mutely. "Would you like tea? Coffee? Actually, it's a bit late for that. Hot chocolate?" He offered

"Hot chocolate sounds nice."

"Mind grabbing a mug from the cupboard? I'd do it but I don't quite trust my back to let me reach it." He was leaning pretty heavily on his cane.

"Old man." Phil just smiled patiently, watching him with an odd expression on his face as he walked around to get it, handing it over. "What?" He asked defensively.

"I don't know, I just assumed you'd use your powers to get it for some reason."

Tommy shrugged. "Mum was always very strict about not using it. 'specially around people."

That got a slight smile out of him. "I suppose I'm used to doing far more illegal stuff than using powers at home." He said lightly. "You don't have to worry about it here, we made more than certain that there's no way to see anything."

"I don't know." He sat back down. "Feels weird now." Phil accepted that, turning away and busying himself, the kitchen falling into silence. Tommy slumped in his chair a chair, tracing the wood grain of the table, lost in thought.

A mug was set down in front of him, jolting him out of it, and he murmured a quiet thanks, a little ill at ease, not used to being alone with Phil without one or the other of the brothers to bounce off of. He poked it idly with the spoon, pushing the marshmallows around.

"It's not poisoned." He looked up and Phil set down his own mug, taking a sip, before turning away, keeping a careful eye on him, but saying nothing. He kept finding little things to do, first the washing up, then drying the plates, putting them away, organising the fridge.

“Don’t worry about me, I’m fine.” Tommy said finally. Phil set the dish cloth down.

“I can’t sleep either.” He explained. “Don’t take it personally, just...in a bit of pain right now, waiting for it to pass.” He motioned at his cane, leaning against the wall.

“What did you do to your back?” He asked, a little intrigued. Phil just waved his hand.

“Old injury, it’s a long story.”

He fell back into silence again, staring into the dregs of chocolate in his cup, swirling it around. “Will said he had a brother.” He said suddenly, watching for a reaction.

Phil looked taken off guard, but not necessarily surprised. “Techno?”

“No, another brother.”

“Ah.” Clarity swept over the older man’s expression. “I see. You should ask him.”

“I need to know.” He cut in urgently, not knowing quite why, but certain that he did.

“I don’t know what he’s told you, or how much he wants to say.”

“Just said he had one, and I reminded him of him or something.”

Something softened behind Phil’s eyes. “I suppose I can see that, from what Wilbur told me of him.” He paused. “Very well. I’m sure he won’t mind.” He took a seat. “Kristin told you where we found them, didn’t she?”

“Kinda? She was kind of out of it, it went round in circles.” Phil nodded sympathetically.

“Long story short, she got word about three kids showing signs of meta activity had been taken from a children’s home about a year prior, and had been shipped around the country in an Enforcer convoy, to god knows where for god knows what.”

Tommy leaned forward, listening intently. “How did you do it?”

“Kristin told me the location, opened the boys suppressor cuffs before I got there and filled them in on the plan, they were more than happy to play along. But, I mean we were infiltrating and robbing a military convoy.” He said grimly. “There were always going to be risks. I was lucky enough to get away with Wilbur and Techno.”

“And Will’s brother?”

“He was...torn out of his arms as I flew away. If we turned back we’d all die, I chose to go.” The lines on his brow deepened, aging him, guilt clearly weighing heavy on him, unable to quite make eye contact.

“You didn’t look for him?”

“In the beginning, no, we decided we couldn’t risk it, I was just a ‘dead’ hero with two escaped meta children, we didn’t have the resources or anything. By the time we did it was too late.” He set his mug

down, staring at it. "There were no records on him, at all. They'd deleted him from existence, we were too late."

"Did you ever find out what happened to him?" He felt like he should stop, it was clearly taking a toll but Phil humoured him, and he didn't know when he'd get this chance again.

"They covered their tracks well, but there was something." He said, after a long while. "The trail went cold at an unmarked grave outside of Poppy containment facility, the one the boys were being sent to. We can't ever know for sure, but, you know." He stared into the distance. "Techno has come to terms with it, with time. Wilbur never did."

"Is he...alright?"

"He still blames himself. As you've seen, Wilbur trusts fast or not at all. One mistake on your behalf and the trust is never earned back, one fault on his and he'll never forgive himself, perceived or otherwise. That's where the Syndicate comes in, that's the big secret." Phil said simply, as if he wasn't revealing information people would kill for on a kitchen table in the half light in his pyjamas. "When they were old enough, they decided to get their own back at the Enforcers for what they did, not just to Will's brother, but to all of the kids who got lost."

Tommy had no reply to that. "Just another kid lost to Enforcers, in the end." Phil said grimly. "You, Will, Techno, you were the lucky ones, even though it'll never feel like it."

There was a heaviness in the air. Tommy's eyes filled with tears, not even quite knowing why. For Eret sentenced to a living death, for a boy he'd never even known in an unmarked grave, for all the victims of the hospital attack, the innocent casualties of a city at war with itself one way or another. Phil held his arm out, looking a little watery eyed himself, and Tommy fell into him without even thinking about it, resting his head on the older man's shoulder.

They were silent for a little while, Phil saying nothing even as Tommy began to cry, giving him the time he needed until he was ready to sit up on his own again.

He pulled away finally, wiping his eyes. "So how did she know? Kristin, how did she know you."

"Kristin has been with us for some time." He said carefully. "She'll have to explain to you the details, but she was key to quite a few things we've done. Not that she realised exactly who she was working with until we met at the ball."

"She's been...working with you? For that long?"

"It's nothing you need to worry about." Phil assured him. "She never betrayed you, never spoke a word about having a son in the Agency, I never asked, that wasn't our deal. She gave us what the Enforcers didn't want in our hands and in return we did what we could to take them down. It was business only." He waited for the almost inevitable fallout, but it never came. "You don't mind that?"

"Did you expect me to?"

“Yes, actually, considering your reactions to the rest of us.”

“I don’t know.” He pressed his head in his hands. “I’m a meta, with a former police commissioner for a mum, I fucking hate Enforcers. After what Will said happened at the hospital, after they shot her, after they burned my house down, after yesterday, I can’t make myself feel sorry for them.”

“You’re taking this very well.” He said kindly. “I’m impressed.”

“What happened to her after? Is that why Wilbur put that thing on her, because she helped you back then?”

“She asked for it.” Phil explained. “It was never forced on her, Wilbur hates doing that, and no, it’s more than that, but again that’s her place to tell, not mine.”

“He didn’t seem to mind with me.”

Phil’s expression softened. “That was my decision. And I’m sorry for the stress it caused you, you don’t have to forgive me for it but I wanted to keep you safe.”

“Does she have a cool code name at least?” He asked, not really expecting an answer. Phil mulled it over for a few seconds.

“Hestia, she chose it.”

“Hestia.” He tried it out, rolling the word around his mouth. “Seems cool, don’t know what it means.”

“I’m sure Techno would be happy to tell you.” He took a sip from his nearly cold hot chocolate.

“Why the sudden curiosity.”

Tommy looked down. “It seems relevant to what you just said.”

“I mean in general, you’re much more curious tonight, less angry.” He noted, no particular emotion attached to it. “Is it to do with what happened yesterday?”

“A bit.” he mumbled.

Phil leaned forward. “I won’t push. Kristin didn’t tell me much other than handing me the address of where to drive and saying we might have to break you out so I don’t know much.” That earned a soft huff of laughter, Tommy shaking his head knowingly. “But it’s clearly on your mind.”

“They took Eret.”

“The name rings a bell.” He said slowly, something there but not recognising it fully.

“Runs a bookstore on 7th street, Techno buys books there. That’s how we met.” Tommy answered shortly. “They were a meta apparently. I didn’t know.” He stared blankly at the wall. “It’s not right, it’s not fair, and I couldn’t even do anything and no one was coming. I thought they were there for me, I didn’t think...” His breath caught in his chest. “I didn’t even think about that. They could have found out about the Syndicate, about what I know, I could have.”

“Easy.” Phil laid a hand on his shoulder. “It’s fine, it didn’t happen. And it won’t ever happen, believe me, you know now better than most why the boys wouldn’t allow it.”

“But what if they didn’t manage to get me out.”

“It’s a possibility.” He said frankly. “It could have been you, and I don’t say that to be unkind, or to scare you. I’m trying to make you see where I’m coming from. I’ve seen first-hand what they do when you know things you shouldn’t have. That’s what I’ve been trying to protect you from.”

“What if it was?”

“We would have found you somewhere to stay. We had plans to send you to Persephone if we had to break you out while the search calmed down.”

“More codenames?” Phil nodded wryly.

“I’m sorry. It’s as much for you as it is for me, I won’t take unnecessary risks with their lives.”

Tommy drummed his fingers on the table, twisting the fabric of his hoodie in his fingers, taking a vengeance out on it. “Where do you fit into all of this?”

“I realise I haven’t really confirmed that.” Phil said slowly. “I’m the head of the Syndicate, you probably already gathered that. Thanatos.” The admission didn’t really come as a surprise, but he wanted to hear it from him, in his words. And perhaps it was made easier by how hard it was hard to take him seriously, with a small moustache of hot chocolate over his top lip, humming along quietly to the radio at god knows what hours in the morning.

“Where’s Will? I didn’t see him last night.” Phil asked on a bit more of a lighter note. “Were you two alright?”

“He’s fine. He fell asleep on my chair.”

The older man’s face split into a smile. “Is he still there?”

“Was when I left. Why?”

“I want to see this.” He got to his feet, leaving his mug in the sink, heading towards the door. Tommy ducked under his arm, slipping past, careful not to make too much noise, waiting for the older man. He was struggling a little with the stairs, not slowed down much but clearly a little in pain. Tommy held out a hand to help him up and he took it with a relieved expression.

“Is it always this bad?”

“No. It hasn’t been this bad in a long time.” He said. “But stress makes it worse and there’s been plenty of that lately.” He reached the top, and Tommy pushed his door open quietly, poking his head around.

Wilbur was still curled up, blanket pulled up to his chin, a little too long to fit on it comfortably but he had done his best. Every now and then a gentle snore would echo through the room, it was all horribly domestic, one leg hanging out, hand sprawled across the arm of the chair.

Phil's expression was so fond it was almost nauseating, Tommy making a fake gagging noise behind him, creeping in

"He sleeps heavy." Phil said quietly, not making as much of an effort to not wake him. "As long as we aren't too loud we'll be fine. It's Techno that's the light sleeper." He perched on the end of Tommy's bed so he didn't have to stand, looking around. "We'll have to get you some more things." He mused. "You don't have much."

"Yeah well, the plan was for me to move out eventually." He reminded him. Phil turned to regard him with an oddly piercing expression.

"And now? Where do you stand on that?" He didn't know how to reply to that anymore.

He was saved a few moments later as Phil laughed suddenly, picking up the comics Tommy had left discarded on the floor, turning them over to get a better look. "Kristin said you liked these. I didn't realise you still had them."

"Yeah, what about them." He leapt to the defense, leaning over and snatching them out of his hand

"I gave them to her, years ago as a joke. Back when these things were all the rage."

"Yeah well he's dead now." He said a little spitefully, not appreciating being laughed at

"Oh Tommy." Phil said sadly. "He's not dead. At least, not in the way you think he is."

"What do you mean?"

"You know, I'm surprised you haven't put it together yet."

Tommy sat up. "I don't know what you mean."

"There's a reason my name is Thanatos." Tommy waited for him to continue. "Greek personification of death. Normally depicted with a pair of black wings. Death, black wings, where have you seen that before."

He stared at him, confused for a few minutes, before shaking his head. "You're joking."

"You didn't think Kristin asked just anyone to help her break into a military convoy, did you?" He leaned on his cane, almost subconsciously standing up a little straighter, shoulders back. "I mean, we skirted around what I did a little, but I don't see any point doing that anymore, you know far worse."

"You're lying. That doesn't make any sense."

"Will's powers, and a carefully placed distraction in the registry office, and my identity was wiped from existence, Philza Craft was gone, and I was just Phil Watson. Archangel is dead, he always will be, and that's fine by me."

"I don't believe you."

"I'm not here to make you believe me."

“Where are your wings then?” He challenged, already half knowing the answer but he wanted to hear it.

“There was a price, for what I did.” He reached up, pulling the collar of his shirt down a little at the back, revealing the top of a thick, jagged scar, that no doubt ran all the way down his back. Tommy’s eyes widened in a kind of horror.

“What happened? Like what really happened?”

He shrugged, “It’s not easy to disappear. We were caught, on the first night actually, Techno and Will got away, I got away with my life and that’s what matters.” He seemed very casual about it, his delivery matter-of-fact.

Tommy’s eyes fell down to the cane. “So that’s why.”

“That’s why I use the cane.” He confirmed. “At first because I didn’t know how to balance without them, and now because some days it wrecks my back.” It made sense, horrible, painful sense, but he refused to accept that yet. It was all there, always there, but he’d become so numb to life changing revelations now it just washed right over his head. “We couldn’t really get medical care for it. That would have given me away immediately, so I did what I could, it didn’t heal well though.”

Tommy was silent for a little while. “You know I thought you were a hero growing up.”

“Kristin told me.”

He flushed red. “Course she fucking did.” A million questions crowded his mind all of a sudden, hanging on the tip of his tongue, but he didn’t know what to ask first. “Don’t you miss them? The wings.” He said finally

“If I still had them, I wouldn’t have been able to give Will and Techno the life I have.” He said firmly. “I built myself a future, I never would have had that in the agency. I gave up half a freedom for a whole one, and if I had to make the choice again, I would.”

“But do you miss them?”

He nodded quietly. “Every day.”

“I’m sorry.” Tommy said finally.

“It’s not your fault. Like I said, I’ve had a life I never could have had otherwise, I made it work. I shouldn’t have had to do that, but I did, and it worked out in the end.”

“You say that like you just got a job.” Tommy noted. “And didn’t set up a terrorist organisation.”

“Well, I can’t really take all the credit.” He said lightly. “The boys helped.” He reached out, taking Tommy’s hand, squeezing it a little awkwardly, but with genuine heart behind it. “I’m sorry things haven’t been easy, to put it lightly. I’m sorry sometimes my decisions won’t make sense, or if I seem over cautious, or overprotective, if I go too far, don’t be afraid to tell me.”

“I won’t. Call you a fucking bitch while I’m at it.” Tommy said sleepily. “Don’t worry.”

He laughed quietly. “Yeah, you would. But anyway, I hope you know I never would have wanted to hurt you.”

“I know.” And he did, somehow. Archangel, Thanatos or Phil, Phil had been kind to him, if distant, and now he understood why he couldn’t find it in his heart to blame him. He sunk down, staring up at the ceiling, thoughts running free around his head.

“You know what, Will’s right, it’s too late now.” Phil said thoughtfully.

“What?”

He stood up from the end of the bed, sure of himself, like he’d made his mind up about something. “Go to sleep. We’ll talk in the morning.”

“Wait what do you mean by that?” Tommy sat up. “What are you talking about?”

“There’s only so much we can say to change your mind. I think it’s time we showed you.”

Chapter End Notes

Anyway sorry this was delayed, there was a huge fight outside and windows were getting broken, the police had to turn up but new chapter pog?
Dadza pog? (That's a trick question, Dadza always pog) *nodders*

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Everything you knew will fall apart(But it'll be alright)

Chapter Notes

Chapter title is from constellations, by the Oh Hello's

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

The others were already up, bustling back and forth in the kitchen, getting ready to go somewhere as he wandered in, still only half awake. Kristin was sat at a chair by the table, a travel mug in her hand. She reached out, taking his hand. “Good morning.”

“Morning.” He rubbed his eyes. “What’s going on?”

“Tell you in a minute. Are you alright?” She looked concerned. “You rushed off last night, I guessed you wanted space,”

“I don’t know, finding out the Watson family trauma at four am is interesting.” He glared at her slightly. “When were you planning on telling me Phil was Archangel.”

Kristin blinked. “Oh. He told you?”

“Well yeah, as we’ve gathered, I’m dumb as bricks and won’t notice every sign until someone tells me.” He replied sarcastically. “So thanks for that.”

“Tommy you can’t say that about yourself.” She chided.

“Well it’s true.”

“Alright, you’re stupid, and I love you for it.” She teased him gently, squeezing his hand.

“Fuck you, only I’m allowed to talk shit about myself.”

The lines around her eyes deepened in a smile. “If you say so.” She looked better than she had in days, more alert, and relaxed, still not back to her usual self, and probably wouldn’t be for a while, but she was there.

“Are you going somewhere?” He took in her coat and travel mug properly.

“Yes. Go get your shoes on.”

“Wait, I’m coming? What about breakfast?” He complained, casting a longing glance at the fridge. “I’m hungry.”

“Phil said we can grab it there.” She promised, pausing for a moment. “You know it’ll be my first time seeing this as well.” She added.

He sobered slightly. "Sure. Hestia." She didn't even look guilty, reaching out to push a curl of hair out of his eyes.

"It'll make sense soon, I promise."

"What did you tell them, what did you do? Where are we going?" He demanded.

"Not now, not yet anyway. It'll all make sense I promise."

"It better." He said grumpily, but he was too tired to make a real issue out of it. Phil pulled on a coat, Techno helping him with the sleeves where his back didn't allow, handing him his cane.

"Toms you're with me." Wilbur called over. "We're in my car."

"We're going in two cars?"

"Yup, we drew the short straw and we're leaving first." With no other idea of what to do he went along with it, dragging his shoes on.

"How long are we going to be out? Should I bring my phone?"

"No, and leave any other devices here." Will said firmly. "Anything that can be tracked at all." Tommy gave him a wary look, but complied begrudgingly, setting it aside, following them out, pulling a jacket on.

"Is that mine?" Techno raised an eyebrow. "I'm pretty sure that's mine, I gave it to you the other night."

"Tough luck, mine now bitch." The jacket was clearly too big for him, but it was comfortable, and he wasn't about to give ground now. Techno just shrugged, stealing the front seat, settling down with one headphone in. Tommy was forced into the back, digging around for the seat belt, pulling a face at the amount of wrappers he unearthed from between the seats. "So where are we going?"

"Not telling ya." Will suddenly reached inside his coat, patting his pocket as if to make sure something was still there though Tommy didn't have a clue what, before pulling out of the drive, looking left and right. "But we're racing Phil there." Techno rolled his eyes but said nothing, clearly used to this.

"Why do I feel like I'm being kidnapped." Tommy sunk back a bit into his seat, watching them both suspiciously.

"Eh, it was a kidnapping with parental consent, so we're fine." Will informed him. "You're a minor, you still have to do what Kristin says and she says it's fine."

"Yeah, cos I'm famous for doing what I'm told." Tommy retorted

"Touche."

The tension that had followed them since the fateful night of the riot had almost completely lifted, replaced by a kind of palpable, excitement, Wilbur clearly eager to get wherever they were going. His

brother was more indifferent, head down, only really moving to glare at him when he put some annoyingly upbeat song on the radio, bobbing his head back and forth

“You’re in a good mood, it’s fucking obnoxious.” Tommy grumbled. “Please stop.”

“Aww. Someone’s not a morning person.”

“Will you have never been a morning person.” His brother said, not looking up. “Don’t pretend.”

“You dragged me out without breakfast, or telling me where I’m going, and you won’t stop fucking smiling, it’s weird.” Tommy added. Wilbur immediately schooled his expression, mouth tilted, eyebrows downcast, frown lines deepening on his brow.

“Is this better? Miserable enough for you?”

“That’s good. Just stay like that.” Tommy said agreeably. Wilbur turned back, holding the expression for about five seconds before breaking back into a grin again, humming to himself.

Techno turned to look at him after a little while, an odd expression on his face. “Will told me about Theseus.” He said carefully.

“Okay listen...”

“I’m honoured you chose the name I gave you.” He continued quietly, before Tommy had a chance to make up an excuse of some kind. “I’m surprised I didn’t connect the dots between my Theseus in the book store and the hero sooner.”

Tommy flushed red. “Don’t let it go to your head. It’s not like I had any other ideas.”

“You’ve had a Syndicate name all along, you were really doomed from the start.” Wilbur tossed over his shoulder cheerfully.

“Wilbur shut up, I’m trying to have a moment.” Techno glared at him. “You’re ruining my moment.”

“I’m sorry, if I ever hurt you. I had no idea you were a child.”

“I’m not a child.”

“You are though.” He said simply. “You are, you’re 16. You won’t get it until you’re older, cos right now you feel the oldest you’ve ever been, but you’ll see.”

“I’m nearly seventeen.” Tommy shot back. “I’m plenty old enough.”

“You need to take advantage of the chances to be a kid you get.” Techno said flatly. “I mean, he sure does.” He jabbed his thumb at his brother, and Wilbur whistled cheerfully. He stuffed a piece of bubblegum into his mouth, giving him a pink stained grin.

“Want some?”

“I’m...good, thank you.”

They pulled down a long road that clearly had been out of use for some time, weeds growing up through fractured tarmac, the wheels bumping over them. Tommy braced himself,

He pulled into a small, lopsided shed, filled with empty cans and rubbish, hopping out. "Here we are."

Tommy stepped out, unimpressed. "I'm getting pretty sure this is a kidnapping." He was joking, mostly, his heart starting to beat a little faster, moving a little away from them as the brothers grabbed what looked like a tarpaulin of some kind from the corner, dragging it over the car.

"Why are we hiding it?" He asked

Wilbur shrugged. "Just in case. Techno you're being useless." He wasn't even dignified by a response, leading them out across a small car park to an abandoned warehouse, crates stacked up against one wall. He pushed them aside, revealing a small door hidden behind them, ducking into the warehouse itself.

Light fell on the floor through cracks in the roof, scattered with rubbish and debris from the slowly crumbling building.

Someone was waiting for them in the middle of the warehouse, looking very out of place, a red shawl around her shoulders, budding deer antlers on their head. They scowled slightly at Wilbur as he sauntered over, hands in his pockets, a grin on his face.

"Hi, Snifferish. Fancy seeing you here."

"Hello Wilbur." She replied flatly, keeping one suspicious eye on him, giving a nod to Techno, before her eyes landed on the third member of the party. "And you must be Tommy."

"Tommy this is Persephone, or Sniff, as she prefers to be called, don't ask me why I think it's a stupid name."

Sniff glared at him, folding her arms. "Are we waiting for anyone else?"

"Yes, for Phil and Hestia." Techno intervened before Wilbur could try and wind her up any more.

"They took the long way around." Sniff tilted her head, intrigued.

"Oh she's coming?"

"You know her?"

Sniff looked at Wilbur automatically. "He knows what he's getting into doesn't he?" She asked carefully

"Not entirely, he knows what he needs to know."

"Well, if that ain't fucking ominous I don't know what is." Tommy muttered, hopping from foot to foot impatiently. He studied the newcomer for a bit, trying to get a read on her, and they seemed to be doing exactly the same thing back, sizing him up.

"Persephone!"

She broke into a smile, her attention drawn away, raising a hand. "Thanatos!" The names were slightly teasing, like they found them funny. The strangeness of it all struck Tommy all over again, a name he'd never known and one he'd come to fear, tossed around so lightly in an old warehouse, an old enemy stood on either side of him, one with his hands in his long coat, indifferent, Techno slowly winding his headphones up, not paying attention.

Wilbur leaned in, blowing a bubble. "I'll stick it in his hair. He won't even notice." He whispered, nodding over at Techno as Sniff spoke with Phil and Kristin quietly.

"My hair is pastel, it'll be blatantly obvious." Techno replied, bored.

Phil grimaced, raising his head from their conversation. "I think having gum in your hair is obvious regardless of colour, don't you dare even think about it."

"We should go. I don't want to be out in the open any longer than I have to." Sniff interjected politely. "If you don't mind."

"Not at all. Lead the way."

She took them over to a door at the side, punching numbers in a keypad, pulling it open to reveal a dark stone stairway. "Guests first." She motioned to him. Tommy wavered, eying it with a healthy amount of suspicion.

"It's fine, I'll go." Techno went first, Tommy trailing behind him, the others falling into line after that, Sniff bringing up the back, the door locking with a damning knell behind them, plunging them into near darkness, seeming to descend into forever.

"Be careful the ceiling gets lower." Will whispered. Tommy ducked, shielding his head a little.

The stairs levelled out into a long concrete tunnel, lit by strip lighting across the roof, all barren concrete. The lights were flicking on and off, something akin to a horror movie, chills running down Tommy's spine in double time as the air grew colder and colder.

There was a pair of doors at the end, like a fire escape or something, very innocent, but somehow more concerning for it. "We should wait for the old folk," Will suggested. "Kristin's probably taking a while."

"We really should install an elevator," Techno said dryly.

"Do you want us to get found?" It sounded like an old argument. Tommy might normally have interjected but he couldn't find the words too now, eying the doors, afraid of what he'd find on the other side. The others caught up slowly, Kristin looking a little tired, but determined.

"Ready?" Sniff asked, waiting for Phil's approval. Tommy shook his head silently, staring at the floor. Wilbur settled a hand on his shoulder.

"It's fine. I promise." He said reassuringly. "You're going to love it." Persephone reached out, throwing the doors open, and a wave of warm air swept over them, the hand on his shoulder tightening in reassurance. "Here we go."

They emerged into nothing less than an underground dome, easily the size of a football field, covered with grass and flowers, the joining point of four vast storm drains. Small dwellings were carved into the stone, houses spread out on each side down the drains, wooden walkways crossing from side to side over the bottom to make makeshift streets.

There was music playing from somewhere, vines crawling up dark cracked concrete, flowers blooming in windowsill boxes. Nearly everything was second hand, benches made out of old crates, lopsided signs handmade with splashed of paint, and yet it felt homely, all vibrant colours and homemade furniture, even with shops and what looked to be a small library, novels spilling out of the door, stacked up in boxes, more in the windows

It didn't feel like a camp or a temporary base, this was a village all of its own, deep under District 13, maybe a hundred people or more living out lives down here, untouched by the outside world. There were people walking around as if it was a normal day, no Enforcers in sight, nothing, calling back and forth across the walkways, chatting from windows, wandering through the dome.

"What the hell?" Tommy breathed. "What is this place?"

"Pogtopia." Will shot in.

"It's called Haven." Phil answered him. "For obvious reasons. Pogtopia is just something some of the children called it."

"There's children here?"

He raised a hand, pointing to the other side of the south drain, where two kids were kicking a battered-looking football back and forth, another hanging off a rope swing under a bridge. "One or two."

"Welcome to the Syndicate." Will said softly, a glow in his eyes. "Not what you thought huh."

"No shit." Tommy managed. "Not even close. How the hell did you hide this."

"No one looks in District 13. No one would ever think to look for us down here, no one would even think anyone would want to live here. It's the perfect hiding place."

"What is this? Who made this?" He asked, craning his neck to see up. More walkways circled the roof of the dome, more rooms around the ceiling, some of them hung with banners or strips of fabric, breaking up the stone monotony.

"Phil did." Sniff answered, gathering her shawl around her. "He was the mastermind behind all of this."

"You did?"

"Well, Sniff was the project manager, when she used to work with me." Phil said modestly. He motioned towards her to let them speak, which she did so with a look of pride, clearly pleased at Tommy's reaction to it.

“We widened the drains and the dome, carved out the houses.” She explained. “We called it a design concept for refurbishing the broken-down areas of the city or something, I can’t quite remember, and then dismissed it as a failure.”

“As far as anyone was aware, it was closed and left to fall into disrepair.” Phil explained. “Nothing suspicious, nothing memorable, one and done. Kind of genius really, if I do say so myself.”

“How?” He didn’t quite know what else to say. “This place is secret?”

“Completely.” Sniff confirmed. “No one goes in and out, except for myself, hence the...home built look of it all, there’s only so much you can bring down here without creating suspicion, so we learned to make do.” She explained. “There’s no reason for truckloads of items to go to a random place in a broken-down area of District 13, so we find other ways, and it’s worked. And what we can’t make or get it, we grow.”

“How is anything growing down here?” He asked, baffled. “There’s no sunlight.” He brushed his hand along a vine crawling up the wall next to him. “It makes no sense.”

“That’s where Persephone comes in.” Will boasted. “Go on, show him.” He urged.

“I’m not a circus act.” She said patiently. “But alright, just this once.” She reached out to a small sapling of some kind in a pot nearby. It began to uncurl, reaching its branches up towards the ceiling, a single apple appearing at the end of a twig, growing larger and larger, stained a deep red. She plucked it carefully, holding it out to him. He nearly dropped it, amazed.

“Wait that’s fucking cool.”

“Thank you.” She inclined her head to him with a slight smile, “I rather like it myself.”

“Sniff looks after Haven for us.” Phil explained as they strolled along one of the walkways.

“Everything that goes in and out of here is their business. I don’t know what I’d do without them.”

She shook her head, disagreeing but there was a little bit of a proud smile. “I’m part of a whole. And without Hestia none of this would have been possible.” She gave Kristin a warm smile. “My own escape included.”

“I do know you.” Tommy stopped dead in his tracks, staring at Sniff, the odd familiarity that had been bugging him becoming sudden clarity. “You went missing, with two other metas, months ago. We got given your missing posters, you were an architecture student or something.”

She laughed quietly. “Yes, like I said, I used to work at Phil’s company. Ironically the other two weren’t metas, I was the only one.” She reached her hand out, brushing a finger across a drooping leaf, and it straightened, filling with colour again, crawling across her hand, a blossom opening on her palm.

“You went missing what, three months ago.” Tommy said softly. “They reported that you’d killed them. I remember, it was the day Niki...” He trailed off. “Yeah.”

“They disappeared without a trace so people made assumptions.” Wilbur corrected. “Convenient for us, they never even came looking.”

Understanding dawned, painful and slow. "Oh. This is where they went?" He breathed. "All the people they never found? This is it? That's what you've been trying to tell me?"

"Bingo." Wilbur said proudly. "Right on the money."

"The ones we got to in time at least, yes." Techno corrected. His eyes lingered on Tommy for a few beats too long, before turning away again. "Some didn't make it."

"Why here?" The initial shock was fading, and now he was intrigued, turning around and around

"There were people here before, a few of them at least. The storm drains have a whole network of metas and hybrids in hiding, but it was never organised, and it certainly wasn't a permanent home." He looked around proudly. "I think we did a good job."

"Isn't it hard? Down here all the time, with no sunlight?"

Sniff shrugged. "I'm one of the lucky ones, I can go overground, but it can be. But we're alive, that's what counts."

He wanted to look everywhere at once, every corner they turned there was more and more, a kind of corner shop off at the side, shelves made of wooden pallets, stacked high with tin cans and long-life food, seeming to operate on some kind of trust system, a worn notebook at the front filled with all kinds of scribbles of items taken in and out, a pen tied to it with twine.

Another place was dedicated to some kind of crafts studio, half-finished furniture and rugs and knitting lying around, the library he'd seen on the way in had its door wedged open, the inside cramped but cosy, worn armchairs and even what looked like a salvaged sofa scattered around for people to read in, lanterns strung across the roof.

There was a tiny trickle of water down the bottom of one of the drains, an empty hammock strung over it. Tommy leaned against the edge of the bridge, looking down. "What happens when it rains?"

"Most of it is sealed off, it doesn't flood anymore," Wilbur reassured him. "This is old, since they diverted the river years ago it hasn't been needed. We get a stream sometimes, if there's a storm or something, but not much more than that."

"We did have one incident a few months ago. One of the dividing walls to the main system had a breach, but we were prepared." Tommy leaned further over, watching it spill over the gravel, put a little more at ease. The smell of fresh-baked bread was drifting down the tunnel, his stomach growling loudly. Will sat back, waving his hands.

"Alright, alright." He complained jokingly. "I get the point. Come on."

He lead them across the walkways towards a small cafe of some kind at the end, a striped pink cover held up with twine from the roof over a mismatched assortment of tables and chairs, all different styles and colours. It was open, a counter out the front behind a sheet of plastic acting as a screen.

A woman stood by the counter, hair tied back under a scarf, wearing a striped pastel sweater, an apron thrown over the top. Her hands dusted with flour, shaping some kind of pasty, chatting with a younger figure next to her in a red beanie, early to mid-teens, watching the elder work intently.

“Ahoy there!”

The baker turned, breaking into a brilliant smile. “Wilbur!” She dusted her hands off quickly, wiping them on her apron and coming around the counter. “I didn’t know you were coming today.”

“I bought friends.” He waved his arm behind him vaguely in the direction of the group.

“Techno!” She ran over, wrapping her arms around him, just barely coming up to his elbow but it didn’t stop her. Techno patted her on the head, awkward but fond, and she grinned. “Have you come to take Aimsey off my hands, they’re being a nuisance.”

“I’m helping!”

“You’re not helping.” She called back teasingly. “So what brings you down here so early.”

“We bought someone to meet you.”

“Aw visitors? You’re spoiling me.” She teased. Wilbur just smiled, turning around, waving to Tommy, who was hovering behind him.

“This is Tommy, Tommy....”

She turned to him, and her eyes widened slightly. “Wait.”

“Niki?” He breathed

Chapter End Notes

This chapter is dedicated to AceOfSpades, because they asked for one in the discord ages ago as a joke for their birthday. No other reason. Happy late birthday Ace

I have waited. So. Long. It has taken everything I had to not let this one slip, I wanted to say it so so bad.

I’ve been watching your theories and all for nearly two months, and a lot of you were right, although some was definitely more based on hope or blind faith than putting the pieces together, which to be fair is valid. Alright. Hear me out. I, personally, never once confirmed Niki’s death. I said she was out of the picture, which she was, I made fun of some nerds for being in denial, but I never once directly confirmed she was dead, for, obvious reasons. I alluded to it, I let you make your own assumptions about what I said. But anyway.

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Loose ends and new beginnings

Chapter Notes

Song for this chapter is After the Storm by Mumford and Sons because it's just WHT!Niki's song it's so perfect, anyway, enjoy

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

“Tommy?” She glanced at Wilbur and then back. “How are... How did.”

“He found out who we were, we managed to talk him down.” Wilbur folded his arms, looking very pleased with himself

“We know he’s Theseus, if that’s what you want to know.” Techno added quietly. Niki nodded slowly, eyes wide, and then moved forward, gathering Tommy in a tight hug before he could do anything.

“Oh my god, you’re alright.”

He was frozen in place, blood rushing in his ears. He didn’t refuse the embrace, caught off guard and confused, but he didn’t return it, almost not able to. She smelled like fresh bread and strawberries, a light in her eyes he’d never seen before, relaxed, smiling, and very much alive

“I thought you were dead.” His voice didn’t crack, he was fine, he wasn’t upset, he wasn’t confused, he wasn’t hurting, and if he repeated that over and over maybe it would be true

“Aw don’t cry.” She cooed, trying to make light of it. “I’m alright now.”

“No this isn’t real. It’s not funny.” His throat tightened. “I thought you were dead. I grieved for you what the fuck!”

“I think we need a moment.” Niki told Techno, who grabbed Wilbur’s wrist immediately, leading him away. She stepped back, holding onto his hands, looking him over carefully. “I’m so sorry Tommy.”

“You’ve been here the whole time?” Tears welled in his eyes, and she nodded quietly.

“Hold on. Aimsey, could you close the bakery for now?” The teen in the red beanie who’d been watching her nodded, and she motioned for him to follow her, ducking into the back of the bakery.

It was a small, rickety kitchen, lined in red brick and ovens, a sink in the corner, a table in the middle, covered dough rising on the windowsill. The air inside was filled with the smell of fresh baked pastries and cakes, but he suddenly wasn’t hungry anymore, stomach churning with butterflies.

“There we go, it’s a little quieter in here.” She perched on a rickety chair by the table, offering him one but he shook his head.

“I’m fine.”

“First off, I’m sorry.” She begun, before he could say a word. “I really am. I never wanted to lie to you. I thought I’d have more time to prepare something to say but they gave me no warning. I didn’t even know you knew them, and this is the last place I ever thought I’d see you.”

“Me too.” He said dryly. “Believe me, me too. It’s complicated. I thought you were dead.” He waited, letting the words sink in. Niki leaned on her hand, letting him speak. “Ranboo thinks you’re dead, we all did. They just threw us straight into full hero work as we didn’t have you anymore.”

“They can’t give you full hours at 16, that’s illegal, because they can’t pay you...” She trailed off. “They didn’t, did they?”

“Didn’t what?”

“Didn’t pay you, did they.” She realised. “I bet they gave you full hours and just didn’t pay you full pay.”

“That’s the least important thing here!” He snapped. “I don’t care about the pay, I thought you were dead! Kristin and I lit candles for you, there was a vigil, everything.”

“It was very nice.” She said quietly. “I watched it.”

“You were there?”

“No, god no. I watched it on the television, it wouldn’t have been safe to go.” She pulled her apron off, hanging it over the back of the chair, sitting back. “Alright, just ask anything you want to. I’ll try to be as blunt as I can, it’s still a little strange, but I think we’re past the point of me hiding things from you, you deserve the truth.”

“You could have said something.” He whispered. “Anything.”

“I couldn’t. Believe me, I wanted to. But doing so would have blown both my cover, and the Syndicates, and everyone who lives here. The Tommy I left would never have understood. I’m sorry, it sounds like such a terrible excuse, but it’s all I have.”

“How are you so calm about this? I don’t get it. What happened?” His voice was nearly breaking. “What don’t I remember, start with that.”

“I didn’t get it either.” She admitted. “I was angry, Wilbur shot me for heaven’s sake.”

“And you’re just, I don’t know, fine with them?” He said disbelievingly. “Are you joking?”

“I was trying to kill Techno, because he had you hostage, and obviously I didn’t know he wouldn’t carry through that threat.” She said simply. “Wilbur acted in defence of his brother, I don’t like what happened but I understand why.”

“They ambushed us and you’re acting like it was your fault?” The disbelief had turned to concern

“They weren’t there to hurt us, they came for me. That’s why they were at the shop, that’s why they followed us that evening, someone told them that I might be open to their cause, and that I might be in

danger if I stayed with the Agency for much longer, so they tried to get to me first. Things didn't go to plan, and they had to make decisions fast. I'm alive, that's what counts."

"Why didn't they take me too if they were so worried then." He said sarcastically.

"Because too many people draw attention. One dead hero is one thing, two missing heroes, with no bodies, that's suspicious. They needed someone to tell them I was gone." She shook her head slowly. "I'm sorry. I'm so sorry, it shouldn't have been you. It wasn't my decision, believe me, but it happened."

"They found the bullet casing." He told her. "And your radio."

"They threw it away, didn't want anything tracking us. I begged them not to just leave you there but Wilbur promised me you'd be safe, and there was nothing I could do."

"Nothing?"

"I was dying." She told him gently. "The bullet wound would have been lethal if it had been any longer. I didn't really have a choice, it was go with them or bleed out by the river side. I had no choice."

"I'm going to fucking punch Will." Tommy snarled. "That bitch."

She reached out, putting her hand on his wrist. "Don't worry, I promise you I already have." She said lightly. "It was the first thing I did when I woke up, nearly knocked a tooth out."

He broke into a smile almost unwillingly. "Of course you did."

"I can stand up for myself." She reassured him. "And besides I've been here for what, three months now? I've had a lot of time to think, to work things out. Will and I have had words, we've come to an agreement, we both acted to protect the people we cared about, and all in all it could have ended much worse."

She looked up at him, taking in everything, from Techno's oversized jacket to the tired expression and the tears nearly gathering in his eyes. "I've made my peace with it all now, sort of. I can't save everyone." She continued. "I never could, none of us can. There was a point when trying to was destroying me more than I could ever help. I wanted to bring you here more than anything, but as much as I wanted to I knew you weren't ready."

He accepted that with a bitter smile. "I'd have stabbed the Syndicate to shit for hurting you."

"I know." There was a fond note to her voice, though a little bittersweet. "You were going to be the one to finish them off, you always used to say it."

"Yeah, and that turned out so well for me." He twisted his hands in the sleeve of the jacket, staring at it. "Was it that bad? You never really let me see how bad it got."

She nodded. "Physically, I probably won't get back full strength in my ankle because I kept walking on that injury, not to mention all the others. Mentally, all of the responsibility for both the people we save and for the future of metas was ours, it was too much. We could succeed a thousand times, we only needed to fail once, and it would all be over. We shouldn't have to; you shouldn't have to."

He shrugged. "It's not like we get a choice."

"I did. I was lucky, I did. I thought it would be easier than it was, to be honest, but you spend so long being told what you should do, it's your job, and you should take pride in it, that not doing it makes you feel guilty." She gazed out of the window, lost in thought. "I thought I only had worth when I was saving people, and I believed it for so long. I don't think you're as immune to that as you think either."

"You could have tried." It felt childish even to him, he understood it all, he knew she couldn't have but at the same time, it still stung.

"Maybe I could have." She agreed. There were tears shining in her eyes, she was fighting to keep her composure. "Maybe if I was a better person, but you have a lot more faith in me than I do, you always did."

"Don't say that. I don't really blame you." He said slowly. "I just, it's a lot to take in." She gave him one knowing look and he rolled his eyes. "Fine. A little. I mean I wouldn't have listened. I'm not known for listening, especially to that. But I trusted you, I always thought you had to be dead, because I was sure you'd come back for me if you weren't." That took a toll on her without him quite meaning to, blinking back tears

"I wanted to protect you but I'm not a hero, as much as I'd like to be." She leaned her head on her hand. "I'm just Niki. I was never Tsunami, not really. You knew me, Puffy knew me, and Jack, and Ranboo, and Tubbo and Kristin and that was it. That was my whole world, not some silly costume they made me wear."

"That's not true." He protested. "You were a hero, not like an Agency hero, you just were one. You cared, you put all your heart into it, even when the others treated it like a job you went out of your way to really help. I looked up to you for that." She wiped her eyes on her sleeve and he just shrugged awkwardly. "It probably doesn't mean much but..."

"Tommy from you it means everything." She assured him.

There were a few moments of silence, neither knowing quite what to say next. "What's it like?" He asked at length, a little awkward. "Living down here?"

"It's not bad. It's hard sometimes, it's really hard, not being able to see the sun, or the people I love but I'm alive, I've made a few friends." She said honestly. "And that's something."

"How did you not get caught? How has no one found out?"

"Well, I just didn't go overground. I can't really leave."

"Why not? Are they holding you here too?" He asked, alarmed

She gave him a patient smile. "Tommy the Agency thinks I'm dead. Going above ground would be a terrible idea."

“Will you ever get out of here? Will I ever get out?” His eyes widened. “Does that mean I can’t leave.”

“You’ll leave.” She promised. “You have no reason to hide, just like Techno and Will and the others, they’re not just going to trap you down here for no reason. As for me, I guess that depends.” She sat back, resting her chin on her hand. “Tsunami is dead, I’m fine with that, I’m never going back. If we fail, then I guess Haven will be found, and I’ll be taken to Pandora, if we win I’ll walk out here a free woman and start a new life in the city, it all depends really.”

“How long will that be?”

“It could be years.” She said honestly. “I have no way of knowing. It’s not so bad. I can think of worse prisons, being a hero was one of them.”

“It’s still a prison.” Tommy insisted

“I can use my powers when I want, I never have an empty stomach, I’ve started to sleep properly, my health has improved away from all the smoke and pollution, I’m getting help for the nightmares, physiotherapy for the old injuries they never let me rest long enough to heal, all paid for by the Syndicate, with nothing expected in return. Sure, theoretically, there’s better, but this is the best I’ve ever had.”

There was something so intrinsically tragic in that, that a life in a makeshift village in the drains offered more than the whole city ever could. He slid down into the chair opposite her, finally really looking at her.

There was a colour in her face he didn’t remember, the dark circles under her eyes were gone, she sat up straighter. She even spoke more freely, without the picking and choosing of words that she used to, there was no worry about someone overhearing, nothing to lose.

“That sounds nice.” He managed.

“You sound so much older.” There was a kind of heartbreak on her expression, of watching the people you care about having moving on without you, for better or for worse. “You’re not the Tommy I left. The world hasn’t been kind to you.”

He nodded slowly. “I can’t forgive you yet. Even if that makes me a shit person, I can’t do that.” He stated, unable to meet her eyes. She reached out, taking his hand gently, pushing his chin up to look at her.

“That’s alright. You take your time.” She said sincerely. “I’ll be here, it’s not like I’m going anywhere.” He just nodded and she paused for a second. “Can I ask you some questions?”

“Sure.”

“How are they? Ranboo, and Puffy and the others?” She leaned forward intently, hanging on his answer, perhaps the first news of them she’d had in weeks.

“Ranboo’s fine. Upside of you being fake dead, it got us to talk. We do patrols together now. Thanks for the octopus.”

“Oh I’m glad.” Something hovered around her expression, some kind of mixed emotion. “That was going to be a surprise.” She said wryly, “But I never got the chance. And Puffy? Jack?”

“Puffy’s overworked, when is she not.” He continued, brutally honest. “Jack, I don’t know, he doesn’t really do the talking thing. He told me I should have moved on by now at one point and I haven’t really spoken to him since.” She took that in slowly, guilt flickering in her expression

“And you? What have you been doing? You said you’d been talking to Ranboo more? Do you still work at the bookshop?”

Tommy’s shoulders dropped. “Did you know the owner was a meta?”

She shook her head slowly. “No, I didn’t know them, what...oh.” She read his expression. “Please don’t say what I think you’re going to.”

“They came for him yesterday.” Tommy explained. “I dropped by to help out and the police came in, they arrested me too, said I helped hide him, they wouldn’t even accept my license. If Kristin hadn’t stepped in I’d be in Pandora as well. Long story short that’s why I’m here, I said I didn’t like it and Phil went hey, do I have news for you about where Eret could have been, safe and sound.”

“They can’t save everyone.” She reminded him gently. “As much as we’d want to, in the end they’re working with limited resources, against a whole nation and system that is built against them. We just can’t, it’s awful but that’s all we have.”

“I don’t know.” He said quietly. “All I knew was that I lost you, and then Kristin got hurt, and then I lost Eret as well. Schlatt shouldn’t be president. I should get paid properly, I want a normal job. I don’t agree with how the Syndicate is doing things but there’s something wrong with how things are, but I only just found out they actually gave half a damn about that.” He pressed his hands to his head. “This is a lot.”

“I’m here now.” She promised. “I’m not going anywhere any time soon I swear. We’ll work this out.”

She reached her arms out, and this time he hugged her back, clinging onto her like she’d disappear through his fingers. “I missed you.” He said quietly. “It just wasn’t the same.”

“I missed you too.” She held on for a few seconds longer, as if she didn’t really want to let go, but she did. She headed over to the counter abruptly, turned away so he couldn’t see her crying, busying herself over something

“I-. I’m glad you’re safe. It hurts, but I’ll get over it.” He said finally.

“You’d better come around more.” She said firmly. “I have so much I want to tell you, and show you.”

“I will.” He promised. “You won’t be able to get rid of me.”

“I’ve had worse problems.” She turned back, holding a cardboard box filled with pastries and cakes and sandwiches. “Knowing the boys, they probably dragged you out without breakfast. Here. Tell me what you think of them next time.”

He took it carefully, holding it protectively in his arms, not knowing what to say. She patted his arm gently.

“I’m proud of you. I don’t think I said it enough but I am.” He beamed, the words settling in his chest with a kind of warm feeling.

“I should probably get back.” He mumbled instead of replying. “Will’s going to worry or something.”

“He does that. Tell him off if he does it too much.” She told him. “He’ll fall in line. Take care.”

“Bye.” It felt like a physical effort to turn away, to walk towards the door, but he knew he wasn’t ready to face any more of this yet. It was enough to know she was alive, he could only take it step by step now. He lingered on the street outside, unable to go quite yet, looking back.

She was smiling, even with the tears, she was truly smiling, wiping her eyes on her scarf, looking truly at ease. She picked up a tray of pastries, turning around to watch him go, catching him and waving. He flushed red, embarrassed at getting caught, and turned away, clinging onto the box in his arms, proof that it was real, that months of hell were over, proof she was alright.

Every step away hurt, and yet felt like a release, a weight he barely even knew he carried anymore off his shoulders. It wasn’t gone, and she’d left him with far more to think about, but something about it all felt easier now.

He found the brothers sat on a bench in the central dome, under a small cherry tree, talking quietly. They didn’t say anything about the tear marks, or the way his hands shook, Wilbur reaching out to take the box from him so he could sit down. As soon as it was safe, and Will’s hands were full he reached out, slapping him across the face as hard as he could. “That was for Niki.”

“Alright, maybe that was a little deserved.” He admitted. “I’m sorry, you wouldn’t have believed me, I had to show you.”

“Doesn’t mean I don’t hate you for it.” He slumped down against him, Will putting an arm around his shoulders, digging out a flask from his longcoat. “What is it?”

“Chamomile tea.” He said. “It’s very calming.”

“You what now?”

“Wilbur says it’s good for his throat.” Techno informed him. “Or some nonsense.”

“I need to take good care of my throat.” He said wisely. “You have it easy, you just need to swing a sword around, I can’t afford to lose my voice,”

“Yeah, cos swinging a sword is easy.”

He drowned them out, accepting it, sipping at it cautiously. Wilbur was right, it was calming, even if it wasn’t what he’d normally drink, settling the butterflies he’d been carrying since he saw her stood by the bakery. He handed it back with a murmured thanks, leaning against Will’s shoulder. “You’re not forgiven. Just so you know.”

“We literally proved we’re innocent.” Tommy shrugged.

“And? When have I ever listened to you?”

“No one said you were perfect either.” Will teased him

“I did.” Tommy stated. “I definitely did, multiple times.”

“Hate the sin, love the sinner, I suppose.” Techno chimed in.

Tommy leaned back, staring at the roof of the dome. “Why. Why always me.” It was the same desperate, plaintive cry, and somehow all the more soul crushing for it. Wilbur reached out, taking his hand.

“We got you. You’re safe now.” He promised. And for the first time, at the bottom of a storm drain in an abandoned industrial district, wearing a stolen jacket, lying on the shoulder of someone he used to fear, he was starting to think that might be true.

Chapter End Notes

Yeah so that's a thing. A little bittersweet, but it was always going to be

Once again, thank you all so much for everything y'all do, your comments always make my day, and I've had so much fun, the little community you've made has made this silly little superhero au so much more than I ever thought it would be <3

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Chapter 44

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

He ended up being left on the bench while the brothers went to sort something out, the box of cakes still in his hand. Some of his hunger, and curiosity had returned, and he opened the box carefully, pulling out what looked like an apple pastry of some kind, taking a bite.

The pastry fell apart in his mouth, perfectly cooked, slightly sweet but not too. He almost inhaled it, and then the next, rapidly getting his appetite back. Sniff was kneeling nearby, a trowel tucked into the pocket of her dungarees, digging some seeds into a small flower patch. He watched them for a little while, eating his way through the box, crumbs dusting his shirt.

“How does all this survive, is it just you?” He asked finally, trying to strike up some kind of conversation.

“Everyone looks after them as well, it helps with being stuck down here.” She answered, not looking up.

“What’s it like?”

She sat back, turning to look at him more seriously. “I don’t know, I’m able to go above ground, because I kind of have to to get supplies, so it’s not the same for me. I’ve actually seen you around a few times.” She added, amused. “You just didn’t see me.”

“Fucking stalker.” He muttered. “Can’t believe this.” That drew a sudden, bright laugh.

“If you say so.” She replied, amused. She pushed a strand of hair out of her eyes and he took a closer look at her antlers, intrigued. They looked odd, cut abruptly short, the ends ragged.

“What did you do to your...?” He waved his hand at them without even thinking.

They glanced up automatically as if they could see them. “Nothing. Well, not anymore anyway. I used to cut them off, they’re only just growing back.” She seemed very matter of fact about it.

“Why did you, wait, stupid question.” He realised. “Sorry.”

“No it’s alright.” She turned back to her work, reaching into a pouch on her belt, taking out what looked like a handful of assorted seeds and nuts, picking one out and pushing it into the dirt in the middle of the grassy area.

A sapling folded out of the dirt, darkening, rising up to her hand. A single oak leaf unfurled, followed by a tiny acorn, that grew and swelled, before falling off into her palm, drying out. She held it out, tipping it into Tommy’s hand, closing his fingers over it gently. “We’ve placed a lot of trust in you Theseus. Don’t let us down.”

He barely heard what she said, admiring the acorn. He looked up to thank her, and she was gone, no trace she was ever there, other than the sapling that now stood a few metres away.

He clutched the acorn in his fist, rolling it back and forth in his palm thoughtfully, voices rising behind him, the brothers returning. Wilbur looking very pleased with himself. "Up you get. We're moving."

"We're leaving?"

"Sort of? We have more to show you."

"There's more." He stood up, tucking the box under his arm. "What do you mean there's more?"

Will winked at him. "Oh you haven't seen half of it yet. We still have to show you the base."

"The base?"

"We need to go a little way away from here." He glanced up at the roof, narrowing his eyes. "I think I remember the way. I normally go above ground." He said cautiously. Techno rolled his eyes.

"I'd rather not get lost in the storm drains. So do you or don't you."

"There's a way above ground but we can access it from here, the less we do overground the better." Will said, seeing Tommy's curious expression. "If you don't know the way we're asking Aimsey to help."

"Aimsey?" Will jabbed his thumb over his shoulder, back at the bakery.

"Was with Niki earlier. They've been here since the beginning, just walked in from the tunnels one day and never left. He knows the drains like the back of his hand."

"It's fine." Wilbur set off confidently towards the east tunnel. "I got this."

"Why am I not reassured." Techno murmured to Tommy, who snickered, following him to the end of the street. Will pushed aside a small metal grate at the bottom of the wall, clambering through, pulling it back in place behind them. They emerged into a slightly smaller drain that ran into the distance

"This is all the old city system, goes back hundreds of years." He explained. "The newer drainage system is built on top of this, for god knows how much money, they declared this one not fit for purpose and it was just left, most of it's collapsed now."

"That's...reassuring." Tommy said, meaning the complete opposite

"Eh, it probably won't fall in on our heads." He said cheerfully. "I guess we'll have to find out." He strode ahead, coat spreading out behind him dramatically. Tommy followed more cautiously, looking around in quiet fascination

They turned through tunnel after identical drain, sometimes having to crouch to get through low entrances, almost a maze of twists and turns along tiny ledges and small walkways, a whole hidden world Tommy had never heard of, sometimes in almost pitch darkness, guided by a flashlight Techno found in his pocket

They finally reached a small maintenance hatch, with a metal ladder leading up, and Will spun around to point an accusing finger at his brother, grinning from ear to ear. "See! See you said I couldn't do it."

He grabbed onto the ladder, climbing up and grabbing the padlock on the bottom, pushing a code in. It popped open and he shoved the hatch aside with a loud grinding sound of metal against stone that echoed up and down the drain. "Come on up!"

They emerged into a smallish room, the floor carpeted, a slightly drab looking potted plant in the corner, as well as what looked like a blanket tossed over one of the chairs, a few snacks and wrappers littered around the desks.

Monitors were scattered across the room, one wall covered by various CCTV camera footage of random maintenance tunnels and drains he could only assume led up to Haven. Most of the computers were off, one or two running through something. It was very small, all in all, and very underwhelming, one door leading out the back, but it was locked.

"Welcome to the Syndicate base." Wilbur drawled. "Impressive isn't it."

"It's pretty shit." Tommy said bluntly, looking around critically. "This is it?"

"I mean there's a bit more." Techno nodded at the closed door. "But that's for another day."

"What did you think we'd have? Some giant supervillain laboratory or something." He sat himself down on one of the chairs, spinning around. "Do you know how easy those are to find?"

"Not if you build them properly."

"Just building that would take so much effort and each one of the people involved is a liability, the more people know a secret, the more risk there is of it getting out. We don't take risks." Techno explained solemnly, leaning against the wall.

"Yeah well I wasn't that serious." Tommy retorted. "But it would be better than this."

"It's actually pretty high tech, despite appearances." Wilbur argued. "No one would suspect it's the Syndicate base for a start, that's a good thing, we designed it for that. Also most of our electricity is generated here. We can't take it off the mains, or it could be traced, again, no risks. I mean obviously it can't be a completely closed system because we need to access the outside world but it's as much as we can."

"That's why it's a bit away from Haven." Techno added. "If this place gets tracked down, we won't lose everything."

They were both watching him, waiting for his reaction. "Now what you expected huh?"

"I don't know what I expected." He said frankly, feeling conflicted. "But learning that the enemy you've feared for years operates out of some abandoned sewer maintenance room kinda feels weird. How the hell do you do anything with this, let alone, I don't know, find Niki and the others with this. This looks like a normal office."

They did that look again. "Well, we got a tip off that Niki was in danger." Will said carefully. "And that she might be....sympathetic to us."

“Just tell him.” Techno said cut in. “No point dodging around it.”

“Are you sure...”

“Dad won’t mind. It’s too late now.” He pointed out. “He knows too much already, what’s one more.”

“Well, if they get mad at us I’m blaming it on you.” Will told him. “Fine. Tommy did you hear what Sniff said, about Kristin being instrumental to all of this?”

The butterflies started to come back, he felt uneasy again, watching them very carefully. “I don’t like where you’re going.”

“You know how people always used to say we found metas faster than the Enforcers could?” He asked, boasting just a little.

“I mean they said we were killing them so not the best source.” Techno shut him down. “What Will is trying to say is that we were getting information direct from the source. Kristin was using her position as Commissioner to secretly pass it onto us.”

Silence held for a few beats. “You’re joking.”

“No, we’re serious.” Tommy stared at them both, but there was no kind of deceit showing on either of their faces, and maybe they were just good liars, but Techno never struck him as the lying kind.

“You’ll have to talk to her about it, if you want the details, but it’s true.”

“I-.” They were telling the truth as far as he could tell. This wasn’t just an accident, or a chance meeting at the Sponsors Ball, this was ongoing. If it was true, this was a matter of years and years she’d lied to him, or held back so many secrets. He didn’t have a clue what to do with that. “Well. So. How on earth did you delete that CCTV footage of Niki from here? Was that her as well?” He asked, trying to change the subject. “This doesn’t look high tech enough for any of that.”

Both pairs of eyes were suddenly fully on him. “What did you say?”

“I said how did you...” Wilbur rose to his feet suddenly.

“How did you know about that?” He demanded. Techno had sat forward as well, leaning on his hand, intrigued. Tommy looked back and forth between them, taking an automatic step back.

“Is something wrong?”

“*How did you know about that.*” Wilbur clapped his hands over his mouth but it was too late.

“Void, it was Void.” The words were torn out of his mouth, there was nothing he could do. He staggered back away from Will

“It was an accident, I swear, I panicked! I’m sorry Toms, I’m sorry.” He said desperately, waving his hands.

“Fuck off.” Techno cut his brother off. “He’s not going to believe you. He didn’t mean to.” He addressed Tommy directly. “It’s like how you threw him into the sofa the other day or whatever you did, powers get weird when we’re stressed.”

“Doesn’t mean I like it.” He muttered. “Whatever. It’s fine, I don’t care.”

The brothers shared a look, clearly not believing him, but there was nothing they could do. “We didn’t delete that.” Wilbur said finally. “We don’t know who did.”

“Wait what?” He said, confused. “What do you mean?”

“We mean it wasn’t us. We don’t have that kind of access, that stuff is protected by a lot of security, it requires pretty high level access and we don’t really specialize in that area.”

“So you’re saying…”

“That someone out there knows Niki is probably alive.” Techno finished. “And knows that we took her, and perhaps more. And they’re keeping that information to themselves. Yes.”

The implications of that began to sink in slowly, horror pooling in his stomach. “Who would do that?”

“We don’t know. Which is one of the reasons we were so careful with you, and telling you anything, we don’t know who knows, and how they could use that information.” Techno said bluntly.

“So how did did Void…” Will began

“More to the question, why would he tell Tommy of all people.”

“I’m right fucking here.” Tommy snapped. “Don’t talk I’m not. You leave him alone.”

“We wouldn’t hurt him.” Will tried to assure him, but it didn’t have much effect.

“Yeah well the last two people I cared about that came near you both got shot.” He said sarcastically. “So excuse me for making assumptions.”

“That was the Enforcers. And Niki was self defence, we’ve talked it out!” Wilbur protested. Tommy fixed him with a piercing look

“You’ve talked it out. I’ve done nothing of the kind.” He informed him. “And I hold grudges.” He turned away. “We should head back.”

“What’s the rush?”

“I…guess I have work.” Tommy said slowly. “Don’t fucking know how I’m supposed to walk back into the Agency after this but yeah.” The old feeling of guilt was coming back to haunt him again, more muted now but still there. The adrenaline rush of seeing Niki again had faded, and now there was just a sense of disappointment in himself, watching as he betrayed what he said he never would, over and over again.

“Just take the day off?” Wilbur suggested, completely unaware of the younger’s slowly spiralling mental crisis.

“Missed it yesterday, Warden’s going to be mad at me.”

“You were arrested.” He exclaimed. “He can’t be mad at you for that.”

“You’d be surprised.” Came the glum reply. “He’ll be mad at me for getting arrested probably. I don’t know if...” He stopped. He turned around, mouth dry. “Will.”

“Yes?” He almost lost his nerve then and there.

“Can you...do the thing?”

“What thing?”

“The thing you did before? So I couldn’t tell anyone.”

The words were out before he could lose his courage again. Wilbur’s eyes widened, completely taken off guard. “Are...Are you sure?”

“I don’t want to say anything.” Tommy said quietly. “I don’t know if you’re lying to me still or hiding stuff but I can’t let Niki get hurt again.”

“ You won’t tell anyone what you saw today, you won’t tell anyone anything you know about us. ” He felt dizzy immediately, his head spinning. Will grabbed his wrist, steadying him. “You alright?”

“Fine.” He brushed him off. “Can we go now?”

“Tommy...”

“I said can we go. This place feels weird.”

“Alright.” He headed back over to the hatch, climbing down the ladder, waiting for the other two to come down before pulling it back across, locking it. “Home?”

“Home.” Techno agreed.

“Does this mean I won’t even be able to talk to you about it?” Tommy asked finally as they began to walk back down the tunnel.

“Will’s power isn’t so much the words, they’re just a way of delivering intent,” Techno assured him. “You’ll be able to talk about it with us. If you want to that is, take it at your own pace.”

“Yeah, take it at your own pace, I know this is all going kind of fast.” His brother agreed. “But look how far you’ve come. No going back now.”

For some reason that felt like both a reassurance and a death sentence.

The moment they got back to the house he went looking for Kristin. He didn’t have to go far, she was sitting in her room, talking to Phil as usual, the other sat in the armchair, quiet music playing in the

background. He stuck his head around the door, making eye contact.

“Can I talk to you?” She picked up on his tone immediately, setting down the mug in her hand, sitting up.

“Do you want Phil here or not?”

“I mean he can stay. He probably knows about this.” And if that comment was a little loaded that was his business. He came around the door, and she moved aside to give him room. He shook his head, remaining standing.

“The code name, it wasn’t just because they knew you, was it. You helped them.” He went straight to the point

“Tommy I can’t...”

“Will and Techno told me what you did.” He said flatly. Her expression fell slightly. She looked away, suddenly unable to meet his eyes.

“I was hoping you’d hear it from me.” She said softly. “But maybe it was better this way. I wasn’t getting up the courage any time soon.”

“Why didn’t you just say?” He asked, a little hurt. “You were helping metas, why didn’t you trust me with that?”

“I couldn’t. Not unless you knew, Will made sure of that, I asked him to do it for my safety. I was going to ask him to lift it now you knew about Haven but he got there first.”

“And what do you mean you didn’t have the courage?” He demanded. “What are you so scared of? That I’d be mad? How many years has this been going on, is that what you’re scared of?”

“A little.” She admitted. “And well, after what happened the hospital attack...”

“What do you mean what...” His eyes went all wide. “Wait a minute. The research department. The one that was killed.” Kristin turned away, and Phil sat forward, taking her hand.

“We’ve been over this, it wasn’t your fault.”

“We don’t know that.” She replied, sounding tired, like this was an old argument. “But it’s kind of you to say.”

“They’ve been after control of that department for decades, it was nothing more than that, their deaths weren’t your fault.” He insisted. Tommy stared between them, and then sunk down on the bed.

“Oh my god.”

“Tommy I’m sorry. I couldn’t say anything, especially not while you were working at the Agency, I couldn’t. I didn’t even know what happened to them, the Syndicate couldn’t tell me, for all our sakes.” She clung onto his hand, suddenly so frail. “And you were what, fourteen, fifteen, you didn’t need to know what I’d done. You didn’t need to get involved, it was safer that way.”

“But after that? You could have said, you didn’t need to let me think they were monsters, you could have done something.” He protested.

“It wasn’t safe yet.” She explained. “And Tommy a few months ago would not have believed me.”

”I would have listened to you, you’re my mum!” Even as he said it, he knew in his heart it wasn’t true. Phil watched on silently, wisely choosing not to get involved.

“If I’m honest, I was afraid.” She admitted at last. “I didn’t know what you’d think of me. It’s always just been me and you and you always thought so highly of me, I couldn’t bear to see that trust break if you knew what I’d done.”

Tears were gathering at the corner of her eyes, and he couldn’t bring himself to be angry, she looked devastated. The dark circles under her eyes weren’t just sleepless nights anymore, they hung heavy with guilt, a new exhaustion pulling her down, more than the injuries that he only recognised now he knew.

He stared at the floor, trying to come up with something to say. “I don’t-.”

“No one really teaches you how to be a mum. I had to learn very fast.” She continued. “And how to deal with it when your son grows up and sees you’re not the person he thought you were. It was selfish, I know, but I wasn’t ready for that. And you weren’t ready to know.”

”You saved people, how does that make you a bad person?” He asked, confused. “Sure, I didn’t get it before, but I do now, I just wish you’d told me.”

”Before the attack, it was because it was the Syndicate, after, it was both. Like I said, I was just scared.”

“You saved so many people.” He reached over, pulling her into a hug. “You couldn’t have known that would happen.” She didn’t say anything, but she hugged him back tightly

“He’s right.” Phil added kindly. “You heard Sniff earlier, you’ve seen Haven now, you’ve seen everything you’ve done, you’ve done so much good.”

“I know. And it helped, but still.” She sniffed. “It’s not my place to be upset about this. “I’m sorry Tommy. I wish I could have told you.”

“Why did you do it? You could have gotten killed, you nearly did.” He pleaded. “That’s what I want to know. You could have been killed and I’d never know why.”

“I just want to keep you safe. I want you to have a future, I’d do anything, risk anything, I won’t apologise for that, even if you can’t always understand why.” She told him. “I mean I was careful, but if anything happened they promised me you’d be safe, and that’s all I cared about.”

“And Niki?” She shook her head, immediately understanding what he meant

“I had no idea. That one was someone else, Phil has many contacts. I believed the same thing you did.”

He glanced over at the older man but Phil just shook his head, smiling slightly. "I'm sorry. I can't tell you."

"Even now?"

"Even now." He confirmed. "We took enough of a risk showing you Haven. I have contacts with eyes on the Agency. That's all I can say."

"That's...not reassuring."

"Believe me, if I hadn't Niki might have tried to kill us all." Phil said wryly. "I had to go myself and promise you were safe and under our watch before she stopped fighting tooth and claw to get back."

Tommy felt a warmth in his chest, a light smile crossing his mouth at the thought before the somberness returned. He turned to Kristin, taking a deep breath.

"No more secrets?" He begged her. "I'm sick of secrets, I thought I couldn't trust you because you'd worked with them. That's so much worse than anything you could have told me."

"I'll try." She pulled from him away more slowly, as if she couldn't bear to let him go, pushing his hair out of his eyes. "Give me time, I promise you'll know everything."

Chapter End Notes

Sorry about the delay in uploads, mans got ill, but it can't stop the grind for long

Hope the chapters alright, I kind of gave up on editing because i was so tired so I'll come back in the morning to reread it

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Chapter 45

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

The sense of trepidation had returned full strength as Tommy set foot in the tower once again. Ranboo was waiting in the lobby, already in gear, perched on the wall, headphones in. He was staring off into the distance, unusually distracted. Tommy put his things in his locker, walking right up to him, waving in his face. “Oi! Boo boy!”

He jumped, tearing his headphones out, spinning around. “What the... Oh hey, you’re here.” He sounded wholly relieved. “I was worried about you.”

“You what?”

“You didn’t turn up for work, and you weren’t answering your phone, it wasn’t like you.” He explained.

“Aw, you were worried about me.” Tommy prodded him in the arm. “Did you miss me.” He said mockingly.

“Of course I was worried! You weren’t answering, the Warden wasn’t telling me anything, I thought you’d, you know... gone missing.” He made an odd gesture with his hands, but Tommy understood, his heart dropping into his stomach.

“Uh. No, no it was fine I just got arrested.”

“You what!” Ranboo grabbed his shoulders. “Are you alright? Are you...”

“I’m fine, I’m fine.” He said quickly. “Kristin got me out, it wasn’t my fault. The person I went in with wasn’t as lucky but... yeah.”

He barely had time to react, Ranboo dropping his things, dragging him into a tight hug. “I’m so sorry.”

“Not your fault.” He replied out of habit. “And I don’t need a hug bitch.” He tried to wriggle free, without much effort.

“Yeah well I do.” Ranboo said somewhere over his head. “I thought I’d lost you.”

“The Warden knew. Kristin talked to him.” He protested. “It wasn’t that bad.”

“Well he didn’t tell me anything. I was begging him but he wouldn’t tell me anything, so I knew something was wrong but I didn’t know what.”

“Dickhead.” He muttered.

He was let go slowly. “I tried to go to yours but all the lights were out, so that didn’t help either.”

Tommy shrugged. “Techno was out and Phil and Kristin went to get me. Will should have been in. Dunno why that was.”

“How’s life been there?” He picked his bag. “You settling in alright?”

“I don’t know, it’s complicated.” Tommy replied wryly. “Lot of new stuff to get used to.” Which was an understatement, to say the least

“I bet. You want to talk about it?”

Tommy rolled his eyes. “Cringe.” He perched next to him. “Did you ever know your family?”

“Where on earth did that come from?” Ranboo lifted his head, looking surprised

“Don’t know. I think I asked you before and Spark distracted us or something?” He scrunched up his face, staring at the ceiling, trying to remember. “Yeah something like that.”

“Didn’t know family, had a guardian though. He was cool, he basically raised me.” Ranboo had a faraway look, reminiscing about something Tommy couldn’t see. “I miss him.”

“Is he dead?” Tommy asked bluntly

His head shot up, startled. “What? Oh, no, just haven’t been able to talk much lately.” He said quickly, smiling a little. “Why did you think that?”

Tommy shrugged, adjusting his mask. “You said you miss him, and you sounded sad, and you never talk about him.”

“You never talk about your family.” He pointed out. Tommy just pulled a face.

“That’s because you’ve met my mum.”

“What about her new boyfriend? Is he nice?”

“Why does everyone say they’re dating, they’re not dating!” He protested. “I hate this.”

Void looked completely baffled. “I thought they were.”

“No! No, they’re not stop saying that. You’re upsetting me.”

There was a padding of feet next to them, and he looked down to see a blonde Labrador sat next to them, wagging her tail enthusiastically, wearing a black vest. Ranboo’s eyes lit up, and he sat down on the floor right where he stood, holding his arms out. “Hello sweetie.”

Tommy scrunched up his face, backing away. “Did you unironically say sweetie?”

He grinned, arms wrapped around Fran’s neck, ruffling her ears. “Isn’t she sweet?”

“You have issues.”

“Oh many.” He agreed. “So many. But this dog isn’t one of them, are you.” His voice turned gooey again.

She wandered over to Tommy, and he patted her on the head slightly. Void got to his feet, dusting his hands off. "If she's here Sam can't be far."

That earned him a very strange look. "Did you just call him by his name?"

He flushed red. "Sorry. Been working with Puffy a lot, she calls him that and I got in the habit."

"Might want to get out of it, he gets weird." Tommy warned him. "Wait Puffy talks about the Warden? Normally she's really careful about not saying anything."

Ranboo glanced around and then dropped his voice. "She didn't used to. But apparently he's been getting really odd lately."

"Like what kind of odd?"

"I don't know, very difficult to work with, very..."

"Theseus, a word?" A voice called over the lobby. Ranboo flinched, jumping back guiltily.

"Speak of the devil." Tommy muttered, raising his voice. "Warden?"

The older hero strode over, snapping his fingers. Fran fell in at his heel, trotting behind him as he stopped, folding his arms. "I was informed you were arrested." His tone was cold, displeased

"It wasn't my fault, I swear." He protested. "I did nothing wrong."

"You never do." He said wryly. "So that doesn't tell me much."

"The owner of the shop I worked at was a meta, I had no idea, I swear!"

The Warden held up a hand, stopping him in his tracks. "I believe you. I've been filled in on the details of the case, the former Commissioner informed me she vetted the bookshop beforehand and had believed it to be reputable."

"Then....why do you sound annoyed at me."

"Because you worked in proximity with her for over a year, it shouldn't have taken a specialist task force to track them down. It's your job to protect the public, you should have been on your guard."

"I trusted him, I didn't think."

"And there's the issue, you didn't think. You don't have the liberty of letting your guard down Theseus."

"Oh come on don't be a dick." Spark tossed over his shoulder as he walked past. "You didn't give a shit when that guy who worked for my parents turned out to be a meta." He reached out, giving Tommy a fist bump. "Good to see you back safe."

"Don't intrude on conversations that don't involve you." The Warden said coolly. "It's not your place."

Spark ducked his head, backing away without another word. Tommy turned back to him again. "You could have at least told Void what was happening." He said sourly. "He was worried."

"It was one day, there was no justification for that behaviour, he needs to learn patience." He leaned on his trident a little. "Besides, I think he would have been more worried knowing where you were." He said, a little quieter. "I decided to keep it to myself until I knew what had happened."

He accepted that without much of a fight

"Let's go somewhere quieter. Where there won't be any... interruptions." He motioned for Tommy to come with him, and he cast a helpless look at Void. Ranboo just shrugged, confused, hanging awkwardly back, not knowing what to do

He followed the Warden upstairs into his office nervously, closing the door behind him. The normally immaculate room was scattered and disordered, files tipped across the floor, wires snaking over the walls, the remains of an uneaten take away lying on a chair in the corner. He sat himself down in his chair, peeling his chestplate off and throwing it aside, sitting down in his chair.

"Now, you're friends with the president's son..."

"Was." He corrected. "We had a falling out."

The Warden's brow furrowed, suddenly troubled. "Keep that to yourself."

"What? Why?"

"Because he's gone missing."

Tommy stared at him. "He what?"

He turned to his computer, typing something in quickly, pulling an email up on the screen. "Press secretary contacted me this morning to keep an eye out for him and any suspicious activity, they believe it may have been politically motivated." He leaned back in his chair. "So I suggest you keep that falling out very much to yourself, it's not the time, and they'll be looking for someone to pin the blame on."

"I didn't... I wouldn't..."

"I know." He said grimly. "And they probably know too. That won't stop Schlatt, we both know that. Tell me everything that happened. I need to be prepared."

"I don't really."

"Theseus this is serious." He rested his head on his fingertips, expression never wavering. "Tell me everything."

"Well, it turned out he only wanted to be friends with me to get inside information from the tower, and he basically spent about five minutes talking about how we're never going to get anywhere and what we're doing isn't changing anything and I shouldn't believe in it." He said shortly. "Happy?"

The Warden just listened, an odd expression on his face. "This is difficult."

"You're telling me."

"You shouldn't have gotten mad at him." He said abruptly. "You put yourself in undue danger."

"He was using me!"

"You're hot-headed Theseus. And very self-righteous, that can be a good and bad thing. In this case, having an argument with that boy, let alone shortly before he goes missing, that was poor timing."

"How was I supposed to know this would happen." He argued. "I didn't fucking know. It's not my fault."

The Warden sighed, running his hands through his hair, getting to his feet, pacing back and forth in front of his window. "I bought us time." He said flatly. "As it stands the Agency is on good terms with the administration, as much as we can be. I had to sacrifice a few things to get there but we're doing well. You can't mess this up, we can't let this mess it up."

"It won't make a difference I swear."

"Theseus." He snapped. "You underestimated someone, and you let them run circles around you. That is an issue. You cannot trust the Schlatt family, they are smart, they are incredibly smart. They will stop at nothing, and the boy is just like his father, just as ruthless. I have worked so hard to achieve what we have, I won't let anything happen to it, you have to be more careful."

Tommy's heart sunk a little further. "You could have told me that earlier." He muttered

"Would you have believed me? And besides, it kept us on good terms with the administration, which we needed then."

"So, you let him do it. Because it helped you?" He asked.

"I was planning to debrief at the end of that night, but you looked in no state to do so, otherwise I would have." He assured him quickly. "That was a miscommunication on my end but nothing intentionally malicious." He looked over at the email. "Well, that's that lead gone. Is there anything you could tell me, anything at all?"

Tommy shook his head. "Don't know anything. Haven't spoken to him since, don't want to."

"Goddamnit." He slammed his fist down on the desk, making Tommy jump back a little. "Fine. You said Void was also friends with him?"

"Yeah but he was using both of us. We both aren't in contact with him anymore."

"Send him up anyway, just in case." He turned away, staring out of the window, the dismissal clear. Tommy let himself out, shutting the door behind him as quietly as he could, suddenly very unnerved.

Void was waiting for him at the bottom of the stairs. "He wants to know about Tubbo." Tommy said quietly. "Wants to talk to you."

“We’re, uh, not talking to him anymore? You told him that right?”

“Yeah.” He said sullenly. “I tried. He’s in a weird mood.”

“Great.” He looked up the stairs apprehensively. “I guess I’ll see you in a bit.” He set off, heading up to the second floor.

Tommy headed over to a small group of heroes at the side, Blaze and Android and Punz, the first two about to head out, the latter looking like he just ended patrol, loitering in the lobby for any excuse not to rush off.

“Theseus.” Punz greeted him with a nod. “You survived.”

“What do you mean I survived?”

“We were placing bets.” Android grinned at him. “How long you’d last before he kicked you out.”

He looked between them, trying to find any trace of the joke, but there was none, though they looked amused. “He’s that bad?”

“Had a go at Spark for knocking over a glass of water yesterday.” Blaze relayed.

“He seemed fine with me.” He said thoughtfully. “If a bit weird.”

“Yeah of course he was.” Purpled rolled his eyes. “You’re the favourite aren’t you.”

“Oh fuck off.”

“A little bird told me you had a run in with Enforcers yesterday.” Punz said smugly.

“Where the hell did you hear that from?” He snapped. He made an indifferent motion.

“Friends who work at the station. They haven’t had anyone with a hero license in ages.” He ducked his head, embarrassed.

“You finally got yourself arrested. We were expecting it a long time ago.” Sapnap teased.

“And some other idiot got carted away to Pandora.” Punz added

“He was a meta, just like us.” Tommy interrupted finally. “Stop acting like he was a criminal.”

A slight hush fell over them, Jack eyeing him warily. Sapnap looked between them both for a few long seconds, and then grabbed his shoulder, pulling him a little away. “Don’t let anyone hear you say that.” He said quietly. “You know better.”

“You aren’t going to turn me in.” Tommy folded his arms defiantly. “Why can’t I?”

“Listen.” He said carefully. “Tsunami wouldn’t have told you this, because they’re friends, and she trusted him, but you’re hearing it from me now. “Don’t say anything in front of Jack.”

“What?”

“You heard me.” His expression never shifted for a moment, no sign of a joke or anything. “It’s not worth it.”

“He wouldn’t.” Tommy blustered.

“He would. He can’t help it, but he would, they messed with his brain.” He tapped the side of his head that Android’s metal plate was on.

“You’re joking.”

“Wish I was. Can’t prove it but, you know. Just, don’t say anything in front of him, it could end up turning against you.”

“Jack wouldn’t do that.”

“Why would they let a man who’s half super computer work here, of all places, unless they had some kind of secret agenda for him.” Sappap pointed out. “It makes no sense, he’s not even a meta. Just be careful, alright.” He clapped him on the shoulder, raising his voice a little. “I’m glad you’re safe.”

They returned to the group, the adults easing back into comfortable chatter. He wandered a little away, suddenly feeling uncomfortable, Android’s eyes seeming to drill into his back. The Captain walked in, eating a sandwich, catching his eye and making her way over.

“You alright?” She asked gently. “You look a little distracted.”

“Bad day already.” He said by way of reply, not meeting her eyes. A kind of understanding dawned very quickly.

“The Warden? What happened?” She leaned against the wall next to him, taking a bite of her food. “Tell me.”

“He’s paranoid.” He said. “He was asking me all these questions and digging into stupid things as if they mattered.”

“He’s been like that lately.” She glanced up at the door, brow furrowed. “I’m not surprised. We’ve had a lot on our hands, he’s doing everything he can to hold the ship together.”

“You’re always so nice about him.” He said irritably. “Even when he’s being a dickhead.”

“He’s a good man.” Puffy said firmly. “I’ve known him for years. He’s just not great at asking for help. In a rather self-destructive manner. You’re definitely similar in that, both just as stubborn, no wonder you clash.”

He grumbled in a kind of agreement, stuffing his hands in his pockets. “Yeah well I wish he’d stop criticising every damn thing I do.”

“Don’t take it to heart, you’re doing so well.” She said gently. “After everything you’ve been through these last few months, they do respect you, not that they’d admit it.”

He grinned. “Yeah, I’m the fucking best.”

That drew a warm laugh. “That’s the Theseus I know. Why don’t you go out and grab some fresh air?” She suggested. “I’ll tell Void where you are when he gets out, alright?”

“I’m fine.”

“I’m sure you are. But it’s kind of stuffy in here, and pacing around won’t help.”

“I’ll just pace around outside then.” He retorted

“You do that.” She replied sagely.

He gave in, walking over to the doors and adjusted his mask out of habit, stepping out into the cool evening air. A little bit of the day's heat still lingered, carried down the street on a light breeze. He leaned against the wall, lost in thought, tracing the patterns of the concrete distractedly for a little while

There was a sudden flicker of movement out of the corner of his eye, catching his attention for a moment, before it was gone. He turned away again, almost completely forgetting about it. Then it came again, for a little longer, disappearing into an alleyway a little further down the street.

He’d probably done smarter things, but he decided to follow it out of curiosity, assuming it was a stray cat or something, bored with nothing else to do but investigate. He poked his head around the wall, but there was no sign of anything

He went a little deeper inside, the light growing dimmer, the last of the evening sun not reaching down here anymore, a chill starting to fill the air. He took a few more steps, glancing around. There was nothing there, except trash bags and tin cans, and a few cigarette butts. He moved to leave again, a little disappointed, kicking one of the trash bags in frustration as he turned to go.

A dark figure blocked the exit to the alleyway, wearing Syndicate clothes and a featureless white mask, the silhouette of a knife in his hand

Chapter End Notes

100 kudos in a week? When I was barely uploading? You guys <3

Anyway sorry about the slow uploads, got ill and then my bones all decided to age about 50 years, but I'm hoping to get a little more on track, bar upcoming assignments and things, but after that I should be good. Hope you liked the chapter!

As always, feel free to comment, I read all of them and reply if I can, and if you have kudos to spare I'll love you forever (real)

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Ghosts and broken promises

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Tommy dropped onto a back footing, hands up defensively. “Lethe?”

The Ghost’s hand flickered, the knife flying from his grip. Tommy leapt aside, shielding his face out of instinct but it sailed over his shoulder, slamming into a security camera up on the wall behind him, shattering the glass, piercing the lens.

Lethe visibly relaxed. There was a standoff, the two studying each other, waiting for a move, before he moved around the hero, feet making no sound on the floor, picking his knife up and tucking it away. He dusted off his hands, tilting his head.

“What the fuck. Are you trying to get us both arrested?” Lethe motioned to the remains of the camera. “Yeah that ain’t going to do shit if someone sees us. If you think I’m with the Syndicate, I’m not, fucking look at me.” Tommy hissed. “You got me all wrong.”

Lethe tilted his head, in a questioning manner, and then just shrugged. “Why are you here?” Tommy demanded. The mask gave up nothing at all. “What do you want from me?” It was oddly eerie, no shape or expression, just two ovals for his eyes, shadowed behind the dark hood. He wasn’t speaking, he couldn’t even put a voice to it. He just shrugged, and beckoned to him.

“You want me to follow you?” Tommy asked disbelievingly. He nodded, once, and beckoned again. “You going to stab me?” Lethe shrugged. “I can’t tell if you’re joking.” He hesitated, as if he wanted to keep the joke going, but then shook his head, waving his hands reassuringly, his beckoning growing more insistent.

He turned, vanishing into the shadows, and Tommy trailed after the vague direction he went, intrigued despite himself.

He was jumping from alleyway to alleyway, visible every few seconds at the mouth of another one, leading him away from the tower slowly, street by street. Tommy hovered back, glancing up at the tower, waiting for the slightest excuse to turn back, heart pounding in his chest at the risk of discovery, but also an adrenaline rush that urged him on.

They’d arrived at the edge of the park, in a tiny alleyway, plunged into near darkness. Tommy caught up, Lethe barely visible, perched on the railings of a fire escape a storey up, seemingly adverse to walking on solid ground.

He kept his wary distance. “You’re going to get me killed.” He called up as quietly as he could. Lethe shook his head in disagreement. “Are you kidding me, it’s barely past dark, if you get seen we’re both dead.”

He could have sworn he heard something like a sudden, amused exhale of breath, but nothing more. Lethe pointed at the floor, at a random drain cover at the side of the street.

“What about it?”

He motioned again, and Tommy glared at him suspiciously, but complied, lifting the cover

“You want me to go down?”

Lethe nodded. He lifted it cautiously, but he could barely see inside, it was dark, but it sounded small, and echoey, a smell of damp and rot drifting up. “I’m not going down there.” He looked up, backing away, but the ghost was gone, like he’d never been there at all.

Everything was screaming at him not to, everything drilled into his head not to trust the Syndicate, to run and hide and call-in backup to deal with this, but the image of Haven, of Niki was imprinted on his brain.

He couldn’t bring himself to feel the same, paralysing fear he once had. Curiosity won once again, where he knew it shouldn’t have, but if he stood here any longer, in the middle of this alleyway he’d be spotted. He looked left and right to make sure no one saw Theseus disappear into a random drain cover, and then slid down.

There was no light, only the street lamps serving as any kind of illumination. His eyes adjusted slowly, but as they did he made out the outline of a tiny room, an enclosed chamber of cold concrete, littered with trash and fallen leaves, a puddle of water in one corner.

A camping mat had been laid out in the other, a small figure hunched up in the corner, hugging his knees to his chest, messy hair falling over eyes and budding horns. Tommy crept towards him slowly, confused.

The figure shot to his feet suddenly, snatching a knife up from the pillow next to him, lunging forward a little groggily, as if he’d been startled out of a half doze. “Get out!”

“Hey, hey.” Tommy leapt back. “What the hell man.”

The boy wavered. “Theseus?” He lowered the knife a little, and then raised it again. “How did you find me?” He looked around urgently. “How did you get here? Are they coming for me?”

“What? Who are you?” The boy stared at him for a few seconds, an odd expression on his face. Tommy leaned closer, taking a better look at him in the half light. “Wait. Tubbo?”

“Hello Theseus.” The president’s son said wryly, his defensiveness dropping for a half second into sarcasm. “Fancy meeting you here.”

“What the hell.” He breathed. “No, this isn’t real.”

“I could say the same. How the hell did you find me?”

Tommy stared at him open mouthed. “I. Uh. Lethe led me here.” He said without thinking, still processing.

Tubbo relaxed a little. “Motherfucker. Of course it was him.”

He didn’t even bother to find out what that was insinuating. “What the hell are you doing here?” Tommy demanded.

“Hiding.” He hissed back. “And someone in a bright red outfit is about to give me away. Please don’t say you were followed.”

“I don’t know. I didn’t know where we were going, I wasn’t expecting to see you.”

“That makes two of us.”

“They said you were kidnapped, what is this?” He couldn’t stop staring at him, incredulous. “Why did Lethe bring me here?”

“I don’t know. He helped me get away, he was supposed to be keeping this a secret.” Tubbo said, sounding irritated, looking around as if he’d appear.

“Yeah well call it karma.”

Tubbo scowled. “If you’re just going to toss insults get the fuck out of my house. I don’t need it.”

“House? You call this a house?” He mocked him. “It’s a concrete box.”

“I can’t go to a hotel, I can’t rent a flat, they’ll track me down. This is all I got.” He glared at Tommy through the strands of dirty hair, daring him to say anything else.

“Cool story.” He replied empty.

“I’m serious.”

“That doesn’t answer what the hell you’re doing here.”

Tubbo spread his arms. “I ran away. What does it look like, you think I’m doing this for fun.”

“I don’t know. I don’t know what you do Tubbo, I don’t know you.”

“You knew me.” He replied bleakly, taking Tommy off guard. “Better than most people ever did, and maybe we were only friends because Schlatt saw you talking to me and demanded I did so, but that doesn’t mean you didn’t know me.”

“How am I meant to believe a word you say.” He took a step back towards the ladder, starting to feel uncomfortable. “I’ve been warned about you.” He spat. “About your family, I should have listened.” He knew he was just lashing out, he knew this was pointless, but it felt good, it scared him but it felt good, in the same way raising the gun against Wilbur had felt, a catharsis and a closure he hadn’t been allowed before. Tubbo didn’t even flinch.

“Yeah you were warned about the Syndicate as well and you just followed Lethe all the way here so I call bullshit.”

“That’s different.” He said defensively.

“How so?” He was silent. “No please tell me, how did you go from wanting to murder the Syndicate for Niki’s death to just following their second most shady member into a random drain cover. I’m fascinated.” The mocking tone had been turned back on him.

“Second?”

“Thanatos takes the cake for that one.”

“Call it curiosity.”

“Curiosity killed the cat.” Tubbo said flatly. “Didn’t anyone tell you that.”

“Well good thing I’m not a fucking cat then.” He tilted his head. “And isn’t the full thing like curiosity killed the cat but satisfaction brought it back? I remember Will saying that.”

“Who’s Will.” Tommy shut his mouth immediately.

“No one.”

That got a quiet laugh. “Your lying hasn’t improved one bit.”

“I think I’ll take that as a compliment, because I haven’t been practicing.

“Hey look, I haven’t lied to you in multiple days.” Tubbo said, smiling slightly.

“That’s because I haven’t spoken to you.”

“Yeah. I guess you filled Ranboo in as well, I haven’t heard a word from him.”

“I don’t take kindly to being used.” Tommy said icily. “And I’m not about to let you hurt Ranboo either, he doesn’t deserve that.”

“Neither do I. Which is why I’m here, and not in my greenhouse.” He stuffed the knife in his belt. “Are you done?”

“What?”

“Have you got it all off your chest now.” Tubbo looked around one last time, and then backed away a little to his corner. “Because if you have, I want it on record that I don’t take back what I said, you’re stupid and naïve and you shouldn’t have trusted me.”

“Yeah I gathered that.” Tommy said, confused.

“You should go. You shouldn’t be here.”

He wanted to; he was about to. His feet wavered, about to step onto the ladder and never come back, driven purely by anger. “I want to.” He admitted. “But you’ve got my attention now, and you’re a fucking mess, and however much I hate you right now, this looks grim.” He waved his hand at the rubbish. “I don’t know why Lethe bought me here but I’m assuming he thinks I can take you out of here or some shit.”

“I made him swear not to tell anyone where I was, especially not you. Apparently he took that as an invitation.”

“Yeah well, I can’t help you.” He’d nearly gathered his resolve to leave, deciding there was nothing he could do, growing more and more uncomfortable by the minute. He turned half away

“I know about Niki.”

That stopped him dead in his tracks. “What?”

“I know she’s alive. I’ve known for months.” There was a shifting sound behind him, like Tubbo had sat down. “When I told you I had kept secrets for you too, you didn’t believe me, but I meant it.”

“That’s not a secret, that’s lying to me.” His mouth was dry all of a sudden. “Wait Schlatt knows she’s alive?”

“No. He doesn’t have a clue, but I do.” He turned back, the older boy watching him from the floor. “I hid it from him, he nearly found out. Amateur mistake of the Syndicate’s really, leaving evidence on a common CCTV camera.” There was no expression on his face, he stated it matter of fact, watching for the other’s reaction. Tommy’s eyes grew wider.

“Wait a minute.”

“It was sent straight to his office, he left his emails open, I just happened to be there to intercept it. I told them it was doctored footage the Syndicate intended to use as propaganda, and instructed them to delete it.” He said, a tiny hint of smugness in his tone. “And they did, because no one defies the president.”

“That was you? Wait, no you’re lying.” Tommy decided. “I don’t believe you.”

“How would I know about it if it wasn’t true.”

“I don’t trust a single word that comes out of your mouth.”

“Good. You’re learning.”

“You’re a dick.”

Tubbo nodded sagely. “I can be. It’s part of my charm.”

“I can’t help you.” Tommy repeated. “I don’t trust you, I don’t know who to trust. Everything I knew has fallen apart, and I’m not interested in trying to put it together with the help of some shitty ex friend who’s supposed to be kidnapped right now, so don’t even try. Nothing you can say will change my mind.”

“Cool. I was doing it to protect myself, first and foremost.” He said bluntly. “That’s how I’ve survived up until now, I’m sure you’ll want some brilliant heroic answer of how I did it to save someone but no I snitched on you because it saved me. I didn’t care about you in the beginning, at all, I’d done it before plenty of times, you were just another naïve kid.”

“You should hear yourself.” Tommy said, horrified.

“I do. I hear exactly what I’m saying. I did it to survive. You don’t know what it’s like growing up with that man, not with these.” He patted the budding horns on his head. “What other choice was I supposed to have. I’ve seen what it’s like, I’m not a pessimist, I’m a realist, I’ve seen what he can do. I’m sorry if it breaks your pretty little illusion of peace and freedom and unicorns but you’re not getting anything the way you’re going, I wasn’t really changing anything at all.”

“Whatever makes you sleep at night.” Tommy said indifferently. Tubbo just smiled without any humour, arms wrapped around himself.

“I bet you think I enjoyed it as well.”

“You seemed to really get into your little game speech.” He replied, just as coldly.

“He wanted more, he always wants more, he never knows when to stop.” Tubbo hissed. “Believe me or don’t, but I did that for both of us. You don’t owe me shit for it, I’m not asking for anything but stop accusing me of things you don’t understand.”

“Then help me understand. Explain.”

“I’m trying to. If I hadn’t cut you off, Schlatt would have demanded more and more from me, from you, he knew the Warden likes you, and he was planning to use that, he was starting to demand all sorts of things that would have put you in danger, the best thing I could do for you was cut you off.”

“I thought you didn’t care.” He said dryly. “Don’t try and play that game, you said you don’t care.”

“And I lied!”

He stared at him, and Tubbo stared back, breathing hard, the hair falling over his eyes making him look a little wild. He looked sleep-deprived and desperate.

“I fucking lied Tommy, I keep doing it, I’m good at it, people far more used to it than you couldn’t catch me. Fuck this. Fine, I was trying to protect you, in my own shitty way. You can hate me if you want, in fact I’d really prefer it if you walked away now, I’m not going to sit here and listen to whatever bile you want to spew about me, I’m done with that, but I lied, I do care. Happy now?”

“Don’t do that.” Tommy shook his head, refusing to accept what he was hearing, almost clapping his hands over his ears like a child. “Don’t say that.”

“Why not? What shouldn’t I say that I care. That you were a friend, even if I wasn’t a very good one?” Tubbo demanded. “That I was being purely selfish by keeping you around for that long, because I wanted it. Whatever you and Ranboo had, I wanted it, I wanted those movie nights, I wanted people I could talk with without secrets, I wanted people make pizzas with and do all the stuff people do, that I liked feeling normal for a bit.”

“Don’t say that!” He begged

“Why not!”

“Don’t give me hope!”

It was a desperate plea, both for him to stop and for him to keep talking, to give him something to hold onto. If Techno was redeemable, if Wilbur was redeemable he let himself believe, hope against hope that he could have everything he wanted back, as futile as it was to even let himself go there.

“It’s not hope.” He said bitterly. “I’m the president’s kid, on the run, it’s only a matter of time before they find me, there’s eyes all over this city, and I don’t know what’s going to happen to me when that comes. This is probably going to be the last time we talk so it’s not hope, it’s just me clearing my own name because I don’t care what you think of me, I really don’t, drag my name in the dirt for all I care, just don’t associate me with that man.”

The venom in his voice twisted at the last part, pure, bitter hatred seeping through. He paused, his tone softening a little. “And if it means anything, you and Ranboo were the reason I finally left.”

Tommy had no reply at all to that. It was heartbreaking, in what was left of his heart to be broken, seeing Tubbo speak so wholly for the first time, the words spilling from his chest with a kind of emotion even he admitted didn’t sound fake, couldn’t sound fake, and he let himself cling onto that with everything he had.

Not that it showed on Tubbo’s face, there was only exhaustion there. “There, happy now. Feel emotionally manipulated yet, I don’t know, whatever you think it is I do.”

“How am I meant to know you’re not just trying to use me again.” He said bluntly. “That this isn’t just another lie, that I’m not just another piece in your fucking ‘big game’.”

“It wasn’t like I really had a choice.” Bittersweet regret, but also a grim acceptance, one and the same. The anger had died now, and Tommy only had pity, the boy in the expensive suit and tie he’d met a lifetime ago on a rooftop at a party now wrapped in dirty clothes under a drain cover among refuse and waste, shivering with the cold as much as he wouldn’t to admit it.

“Fuck this.” He dug his keys out of a pouch on his belt, coming to a decision. “I’m going to regret it.”

“Then don’t do it.” Tubbo said, confused

“Don’t say anything.” He ordered. “Or I’ll change my mind. Do you have a piece of paper or something?”

He dug a worn book out of his pocket, along with a pen, confused, handing it over, and Tommy scribbled down his address, and vague directions, pressing the keys into his hand. “My room is on the second floor, it has my name on the door. Don’t let anyone see you, but it has a shower and stuff.”

Tubbo pushed the book back. “That’s not a good ide...” Tommy pushed it back.

“They won’t find you there. Trust me. When I get back, I’ll explain everything. But I gotta go.”

He turned and ran before he snatched the keys out of the other boy’s hand, hurtling back through the streets, already regretting his decision but it was too late to turn back. His head was spinning, but he shook it aside, dodging into the lobby, out of breath, face flushed, trying to look calm. Ranboo was talking to Puffy, looking worried, pacing back and forth. They spotted him the moment he came in, making a beeline for him.”

“Theseus! Where did you go?” Puffy demanded. “It’s been nearly half an hour.”

“I uh. I thought I saw a stray cat.” It wasn’t technically a lie.

“I said get a breath of air, not go AWOL.” She said dryly. “You’re lucky the Warden didn’t catch you.”

“Please don’t tell him.” He begged. “It was an accident I swear.”

“You had us worried.” She chided. “Don’t do that.”

“I won’t.” He promised. “Can we go now?”

“Uh. Sure.” Ranboo said. “You sure you’re alright? You look, I don’t know.”

“Yeah, I’m fine.” Tommy brushed him off. Perhaps Tubbo’s lying was starting to rub off on him with how far that was from the truth.

Chapter End Notes

Ghost of the Syndicate is the most badass name I've ever come up with and I stand by that, I'm proud of that

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Chapter 47

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Ranboo dropped him in his hallway at the end of their shift as usual, disappearing before he was seen. Tommy trudged up the stairs, dragging his bag behind him, feeling unusually drained. He opened the door to the lights being on, automatically looking around for Will to yell at him for being in his room, before his eyes landed on the figure in the corner

Tubbo was sat on the floor, hair damp, but looking significantly better, the dirt washed out of his hair and skin. In the light he looked very pale, deep bags under his eyes, head hanging on his shoulder, shivering slightly, leaning against his bag as a pillow

“You could have used a blanket.” Tommy said irritably, throwing his kit down.

“Didn’t want to mess up your stuff.”

Tommy snatched one up from his bed, throwing at him. “You’re literally shivering.”

“I don’t want to make your stuff wet...”

“Fucking take the blanket Tubbo.”

He took it cautiously. “You won’t be mad if I mess it up?”

“Why would I be mad, I’m offering it?”

“Because you look mad.” He was eying the other boy warily, waiting for the other shoe to drop.

“I’m mad but I’m not kicking you out, I’m not going to get mad at you over stuff I give or offer you, or even if you take stuff unless you’re being a dick about it.” Tommy said tiredly, yanking a clean hoodie over his head. “Kicking someone that’s already down yadda yadda.”

“Didn’t seem to mind back there.” Tubbo said pointedly, “But then neither did I.” He accepted the blanket finally, wrapping it around his shoulders. “I should probably leave soon.” He added, not sounding remotely like he wanted to.

“Wait ‘til tomorrow, curfew’s over but they still have heavy Enforcer patrols. That is who you’re avoiding, right?”

Tubbo nodded. “They’ll take me straight back. They might already know I came here, I’ll put your family in danger.”

“You won’t. And as long as you were careful on the way here you’ll be fine. I didn’t tell you to hide because you’d be a threat to them.” Tommy explained, indifferent. “It’s kind for you, actually.”

“What is going on with you?” Tubbo sat up. “What are you talking about? Who are you living with?”

“You tell me first.” He folded his legs. “What’s going on with you?”

“I pretty much did tell you. I had enough, I ran the night of the speeches, I’ve been out for about three nights avoiding every person in sight.” He tilted his head. “You look really tired.”

“Says you.” Tommy retorted, waving his hand at the other boy’s general appearance.

“No like, brain tired.” Tubbo tapped his head. “It’s different.”

“Huh. Take your word for it. Where are you going after this?”

He just shrugged. “Don’t know. Couldn’t make a plan there as they tracked my search history, and when I left I couldn’t take my phone with me or anything that could track me so I’ve just been bouncing from place to place. I guess I’ll go back to that hole until they find me and drag me back.”

“What then?” He shrugged again.

“I don’t know. Depends how pissed Schlatt is, if he decides to say I was killed off in a kidnapping and no one ever sees me again or if he decides to run with it and have me lie about it or something.”

His exhaustion was making him far more talkative than he would normally have been, not to mention it was like some kind of seal over his mouth had been lifted, he wasn’t as cautious anymore, he looked around the room like he was cornered but he wasn’t minding every word that came out of his mouth. The difference was startling.

“I can’t go back.” He told Tommy. “I can’t go back to Schlatt, I stole some stuff he has to know is missing. He won’t forgive that. You need to be so careful you aren’t seen with me.”

“Is there anywhere you can go? Meta safe houses, anything?”

“You think I’ll be welcome there?” He asked bleakly. “And even if I am, it puts all of them in danger. I can’t. The only reason I came here is because I’m selfish and just want to be warm for a night. Well, pretty much.”

“It’s not selfish. I’m not in danger.” Tommy insisted. “Trust me. I thought I was, but I don’t think I am anymore.” Tubbo was giving him an oddly piercing look, like he was waiting for him to say something, but he never did.

“Tommy?” There was a knocking on his door. “Can I come in.”

“Uh, not now Will.” Tommy called out

“Who’s there, that doesn’t sound like Ranboo?” He asked teasingly. “I didn’t know you had other friends.”

A slight smile pulled at Tommy’s mouth despite himself. “Fuck off.” He stopped himself. “Actually. Wait.” Tubbo’s eyes widened in panic, and he moved towards the bathroom

“You can’t tell him I’m here.” He hissed

“It’s okay, I promise.” Tommy told him quietly. “We’re going to work this out. Will wait out there.”

He slipped through the gap, shutting it behind him as quickly as possible. "Are you alright?" Will rolled up the sleeves of his sweater, folding his arms. "You're acting weird."

"I'm fine. I think I know who deleted the security footage." He said carefully. "But you might not like it."

"You. What? You found out what?" He asked, taken completely off guard. "How did you...?"

"Oi!"

"Sorry." He said quickly, backing down. "I didn't mean it to come off like that. I just didn't expect you to run into anything about it, but go on." He sat back, pushing his glasses up.

"He knows about Niki. He's also apparently currently in danger." Tommy was watching his every move, waiting for a reaction, but Will was in business mode now, nothing showed on his face.

"Who is it?" He asked. "We'll see what we can do."

"It's not...that simple."

"I don't care, I'll ask questions later, is it someone we need to silence or someone we need to protect?" His tone had shifted a little, slipping into Orpheus, standing up a little straighter. It was almost striking the change, in a matter of minutes it was like he was looking at a different person.

"Protect, I think." He answered slowly.

"Then we'll take him with us, and we'll decide what to do from there, alright? Let us handle this. Where is he. Don't tell me..." His eyes travelled towards the door.

"He's here."

"Tommy you shouldn't just let people into the house you..."

"This is different. He knows who I am, he knows about Niki, and he didn't have anywhere else to go." Will opened his mouth, only to be cut off. "I need to talk to him, then you can meet him, alright? Give me a second." He went back inside, shutting the door behind him quietly to find Tubbo standing by the window, bag in hand, eying the door nervously.

"What are you doing?" The older boy gave him a sidelong look, trying to get a read on him

"I don't know. Thought you were going to sell me out."

"No, no, I know a place you can go." He said quickly. "But you're going to have to get cool about a lot of things very quickly."

"I'll take anything as long as it doesn't kill me or anyone else, it'll be better than where I was." He said, exhausted. "You know what. If this is a trap I don't even care anymore." He threw his bag down on the floor

"Will come in." Tommy called out, watching the other boy, ready to stop him if he bolted

Whatever Wilbur expected, he didn't find it, his eyes landing on Tubbo with a kind of bewilderment, noting the bedraggled appearance, the bags under his eyes, and then the horns with a kind of understanding, before taking in his face, the confusion returning, before turning into open shock.

"Tommy I could do with a warning." He said cautiously.

"I can explain." He cut him off quickly. "This is..."

Tubbo had been evaluating Wilbur right back, and seemed to have come to a realisation of his own. "Oh fuck." He shot a frantic look at Tommy, who waved his hands quickly.

"It's fine, it's okay, let me explain, please."

Wilbur narrowed his eyes. "Who's this?"

"Uh. Wilbur, Tubbo, Tubbo this is Wilbur."

"What the hell is happening here. That's..."

"I know." Tommy cut him off

"That's Tob.."

"Tubbo." Tubbo interrupted sharply. "Just, Tubbo. I fucking hate that name."

Wilbur waved him aside. "Please tell me there's a reason the president's son is in this house. If Techno gets back he'll kill him."

"I thought so, but I needed to be sure." Tubbo said flatly, to nothing in particular before Tommy could formulate a response.

"What did you say?" He tilted his head, studying Wilbur. "Hello Orpheus."

"*Don't move*." He froze in place, Will on guard, immediately moving slightly in front of Tommy to protect him for some reason. "This is not your smartest idea." He said over his shoulder

"Not yours either." He shoved past. "Let him go, he's not a threat. Look at him."

"He knows who we are."

"Yeah well you just confirmed it for him idiot." Tommy hissed. "Nice work."

"No he knew too much already." There was a kind of certainty in Will's voice. "He's been watching me from the moment I came in, and I don't like what that implies. *Tell me what you know*."

"I had a suspicion, which is why I accepted Tommy's offer to come here." The words were dragged out of Tubbo's mouth. "I wanted him to say it, but he wouldn't, that's when I was pretty sure. I didn't know for certain until you came in, I recognised you from the footage, you took your mask off."

A kind of horror but also relief appeared on Will's face. "I took my mask off." He whispered. "I forgot about that. But at least we know it was you. *Did anyone else see us?*"

“Some random CCTV operator in District 7, owns a warehouse there, and the supervisor at the meta unit he sent it to, but the guy deleted it and the supervisor was killed with the rest of the unit.” Tubbo said stiffly.

“ Why did you come here if you knew who we were .”

“You’re the only people I know won’t turn me in.” He said, with a kind of bleak acceptance. “You’re probably going to kill me but there’s a small chance you won’t. Lesser of two evils situation.” The command faded and he staggered back, clapping his hand over his mouth.

“How desperate do you have to be to come to the Syndicate for help.” Will said dryly.

“Very.”

“It’s fine. I’m not going to hurt you.” Will told him. “I just needed to make sure you weren’t here to hurt us.

“How do we know he’s not here working for his dad.”

“He’s not my dad.” Tubbo said firmly. “Do not call him that, if he was my father I wouldn’t be sat here in this house trying to hide from him with the help of a hero and a terrorist, if that doesn’t give a clue to how desperate I am I don’t know what fucking does.”

“I heard raised voices.” Techno said from the doorway, which Will had left open. “Are you guys good.”

“Techno I can explain...” Tommy blurted

“Oh.” Tubbo said weakly. “You’re the one Orpheus said would murder me.”

Techno blinked slowly. “That sentence has a lot in it.” He turned to Will. “He knows?”

“He’s a fucking smartass.” Will mumbled.

“It’s the whole family.” The understanding hit Tubbo like a ton of bricks, and he staggered further back, the early bravado gone. There was a real genuine fear on his face, suddenly so similar to Tommy a week ago, stood in the kitchen at midnight staring at Orpheus’s face.

But he didn’t run, he didn’t even look like he wanted to, however afraid he was staring into the face of a known terrorist something greater kept him in place.

“Well done Will. Well fucking done.” Tommy said sarcastically. “You’re terrible at this shit.”

“He’s not going anywhere, not anymore.” Will said flatly. “It doesn’t matter.” Techno watched on, hands in his pockets, intrigued.

“You don’t like Schlatt.” Tubbo addressed Techno directly, spotting a calmer presence in the room from miles away.

A cold smile tugged at Techno’s mouth. “That’s one way of putting it.”

“Then we have that in common.” Tubbo said, as cheerfully as he could muster. “Good to know. Please don’t kill me.”

“I don’t kill kids.” Techno rumbled. “Will is talking shit.” His eyes landed on the horns, and his expression changed slowly. “Ah.” He said carefully. “A lot is starting to make sense. What did you do to Tommy?”

“What?”

Techno’s voice hardened. “I said what did you do to Tommy. I know what he looks like when he feels safe, he looks like he barely wants to be in the same room as you. I’ll say this again nice and slow so you can understand. What did you do to Tommy.” Whatever his previous statement had calmed was now off the board, an open threat in his tone.

“He’s hurt, because the reason I originally made friends with him is because my dad wanted a route into the Agency. He wanted someone close to the Warden he could get information off, so he made me befriend him.” Tubbo wisely chose to be honest. “But Schlatt was asking too much so I deliberately fell out with him a few days ago and introduced him to painful reality and he didn’t take it too well, but in my defence, I was doing it to protect him, because I do genuinely care about him.”

He mulled that over for a few seconds. “Right. I appreciate the honesty. What are we doing with him.” His gaze travelled to Will, and especially Tommy, like he was expecting him to make the call.

“I can help.” Tubbo begged. “I know things, I can be useful, please.”

Wilbur took pity on him almost immediately. “You don’t need to be useful.” He told him gently. “If you need somewhere to stay, we have somewhere Schlatt won’t find and we aren’t going to hurt you. I hope you understand why we’re suspicious but considering what you’ve told us, and if Tommy is willing to vouch for you we can get you there.”

“We can’t turn him away.”

“He could be lying.” Techno said cautiously.

“He’s not lying. And even if he is, you heard him, he deleted the footage of the night Niki escaped, he’s been protecting your identity this whole this time.” Tommy argued. “Tubbo isn’t like Schlatt, he’s a dick and clearly hasn’t ever lived outside of that bubble but that’s not his fault.”

“Why us? Last I checked you hadn’t even decided to sell us out to HQ or not.” Techno asked bluntly.

“Please don’t let this be a mistake.” Tommy said quietly. “This all I have. Please.”

Wilbur sighed. “Alright.”

“For real? And you’ll keep him safe?” Tubbo hummed in agreement, hanging on their response.

“We won’t let you down Toms. We promised anyone who came here for sanctuary would be safe, and besides, Tubbo’s just a kid, just like you.”

“I’m not a kid.” Tubbo said seriously. “I haven’t been for a long time.”

Will's gaze turned understanding. "Well maybe you'll get a chance to be. Get down to the car, we should go as soon as possible."

"Already?" Tommy looked around. "Don't you have to check or something?"

"I'm texting Persephone. Letting her know details." Techno held up his phone. "But he's right, we need to go now, if anyone saw you even near this area we need to get you out of here as fast as possible."

"We're used to moving fast." Will reassured him. "This is what we do. It's a bit unusual but we can make it work."

"I. Is he coming too?" Tubbo glanced at Tommy

"Do you want him to?"

"It'll put him at ease." Techno said, not looking up from his phone. "He looks like he thinks we're about to drive him to his execution. Tommy?"

"Uh, sure. Who's car we going in?"

"Mine." He stuffed his phone in his pocket. "More space. Let's go." He held his hand out for Tubbo's bag but he refused, clutching it to him as they headed down the stairs, looking very lost.

"Tubbo you can't let anyone see you." Wilbur tossed a blanket into the back seats. "Tommy help him."

He looked hugely uncomfortable with the idea of not being able to see what was happening, but he had no choice. He curled up, clinging onto his bag, letting Tommy hide him under the blanket, pushing a few other light things on top to hide.

The drive was in silence, everyone was on edge, Will keeping watch out of the window, no one had anything to say. Tommy felt watched, like they could be stopped at any minute, even though no one had any reason to.

The brothers looked more than used to this, both scanning the streets with a kind of practiced wariness, laid back on the surface but very alert, checking each car and truck that went past, silently noting license plates and passengers.

At some point Tubbo's fingers had curled around Tommy's wrist, a kind of reassurance that he was still there, that the Syndicate wouldn't try anything with him in the car, and Tommy didn't have the heart to stop him as they rattled down the cracked drive to the warehouse.

Sniff wasn't waiting for them this time, Techno punching the code in, Tommy leading the way down into the darkness. Tubbo clutched his bag tighter, the cornered look returning, quietly mapping out every escape route, a kind of panic starting to swallow him whole as they headed down the tunnel.

"Tommy?"

"It's alright." He promised. "I swear. You'll see."

“Can you tell me what’s happening.” He begged. “Please. I don’t like this.” His knuckles were white, clinging onto the straps of his bag.

“Just a little bit further. I promise it’ll be worth it.” He sped up a little, reaching the doors, glancing back at the brothers for permission. Techno motioned for him to continue

“If you’d like to do the honours.”

He flung the doors open, just as Will had done for him, and Tubbo flinched back instinctively before his jaw dropped open. “Wait a minute.” The lights were dimmed in the late night, but that almost made it look even better, strings of paper lanterns lighting up the grass and the streets. “Whoa. What is this?” He stared around. Tommy grinned, seeing his own initial shock reflected on the goat hybrid.

“Welcome to Haven. They only showed me this shit like two days ago but it’s pretty cool huh. They bring metas here, it’s safe, Schlatt doesn’t know.”

“I knew it.” The words burst out of him, and he spun around, glaring at the brothers. “I knew you had something up your sleeve. I knew the Syndicate wasn’t what you said.” The pride returned, Tubbo’s confidence rebounding in an instant.

“Now now, don’t go running to any authorities with this.” Techno said mildly. “I really don’t want to go back on my promise.”

“I won’t.” He promised, “This is...I didn’t even...” He trailed off, his attention stolen by a small figure stood under the cherry tree in the centre, wearing a striped sweater, and sandals and pyjama trousers like she’d been pulled out of bed, pink hair loose around her shoulders.

Tubbo’s eyes went all wide, and then misted over. He dropped the bag he’d been clinging to all evening, breaking into a run, a kind of strangled cry breaking from him.

Niki caught him, sweeping him up in a hug, just like she’d done to Tommy, and Tubbo didn’t resist at all, in fact he almost went limp, collapsing against her. He hadn’t broken in the argument with Tommy, he stood up fearlessly to Wilbur, but now he just broke down, sobbing like a child, clinging onto her.

“Hey.”

“Hi.” He managed. “Good to see you again.”

“Techno’s told me everything.” She said gently. “You’re safe now.” That only made things worse. He was crying helplessly, head buried in her shoulder, he looked his age for the first time since Tommy had met him.

“Let’s give them some space.” Will suggested quietly. Tommy nodded, turning away, a little red eyed himself.

“You made the right call.” Techno assured him. “You don’t have to be friends with him yet, and I don’t know exactly what happened, but I think he meant well, in his own way.”

“Niki’s got him now, she’ll sort him out.” Will said lightly. “And if she doesn’t well, Techno doesn’t hurt kids but I never promised.”

“Will!”

“I’m joking, I’m joking.” He said quickly. “Mostly.”

Tommy glanced over his shoulder and Niki raised a hand, waving to him, understandably mostly focused on Tubbo. He waved back, looking away again, blinking back tears of his own. “This always happens to me. I’m just trying to help.” He said, exhausted. “And I just get into this mess.”

“Good things don’t happen to heroes Theseus,” Techno said dryly.

“Don’t do that.” Tommy shook his head. “Don’t take the name that I’m proud of, and use it against me, I’m not him. I’m not your Greek mythology shit, I’m just me.”

“You chose that name.”

“You chose Achilles. Wilbur chose Orpheus, doesn’t mean it’s who you are, just sounds good.”

“I have my reasons for Achilles. As for Will, Orpheus went into hell and lost someone on the way back. He let them go.” A stone dropped in Tommy’s stomach, and he glanced over at Will, who just shrugged, not meeting his gaze.

“Oh.”

“Then why Theseus.” Techno asked curiously. “If you’re not him, if it means nothing to you, why can’t I use it?”

“Because Theseus was brave and I am not!” He snapped finally. “Because from you it sounds like a fucking joke.”

“No?” He leaned his head on his hand. “I know plenty more people who would have run a long time ago, I’d call you many things but a coward isn’t one of them.”

“Yeah that’s because I’m stupid.” Tommy stated. “I’m kind of known for it.”

“Or you’re used to putting up with far more nonsense than most people do your age.” He said simply

“I know the last few days have been a lot, but it’s going to be okay.” Will said reassuringly. “Things will look better soon, you don’t need to be so hard on yourself. I know we’re a long way from anything resembling fixing this mess, but it’s getting better.”

“The lying ticked me off, now I know you aren’t murderers things are a lot easier to handle.” He said bluntly, leaning back into Will’s shoulder, the older pulling him into a hug, resting his chin on his head.

“Yeah that would do it.” He said dryly. “We’re not perfect, and I have my dumb moments...”

“It’s not just a moment at this point.” Tommy complained.

Will accepted that with an eye roll. "... and it's been a crazy week. You've been driving yourself at a hundred miles an hour. You need to rest." He said firmly. "We can come back tomorrow though, if you want to."

"I have to..."

"Work. I know." He tightened his arm a little, protective. "You know, when this is all over, we're taking you somewhere nice." He promised. "To the beach. Or maybe to a house Dad has in the mountains, we're getting away from it all, and you're going to rest, for weeks or months or however long we can get away with, and you're not going to work, or lift a finger for as long as we can. You've done enough."

"That's if this all ends well."

"It will." He promised. "I swear it will, I won't let anyone hurt you."

He wanted to believe him, he really did, and some part of him allowed himself that reassurance, but another couldn't see how this ended and it scared him. He had an idea of his future once, even if it was bleak, but somehow it was easier than this, the not knowing, the risk, the shadow that hung over his head every day knowing what he knew now. But at the same time, that open question mark was exciting. For the first time, he had options, and a chance to take something back, however small, it felt safer here than he'd ever known.

"No matter what, we'll get you out of this miserable country." Techno promised. "We might not be able to come with you, but you'll be out."

"Then I don't want it." He said impulsively. Techno blinked slowly.

"You've gone from being indifferent about us to hating us, to refusing to get out of the country for us in under two weeks, make it make sense." He quipped

"I can't leave Ranboo," Tommy argued. "Or Niki. Or Kristin. I can't just go, this is the only place I've ever known, it's shit but it's home, ya know?"

"You could start a life somewhere else." He pointed out. "Without any of this."

"I don't think I could." He stared at the floor. Will tightened the hug, a gleeful note in his voice

"Awww Tommy." He cooed. "You care about us."

"If I didn't care I wouldn't be so fucking mad you hurt me." He grumbled. "Which you did, and you owe me everything I want forever for that."

"I mean I was planning that anyway so we can work that out." Will said agreeably, and Techno nodded wordlessly. An agreement ran between the brothers, the kind of silent communication of two people who knew each other inside out, a slight smile tugging at Will's mouth. He turned away, glancing down at Tommy, changing the subject. "Well, I promised takeout." He reached into his pocket, waving his card in the air.

"I thought that was a cover story?"

“The best lies are true.” He replied mischievously, ignoring Techno’s sigh. A grin spread across Tommy’s face, and he leapt up, snatching the card out of his fingers.

“You’re on bitch!”

Chapter End Notes

Sorry for the pause in uploads, assignments have been ruining my writing schedule, but hopefully I'll be back soon, and I might be starting some new fics soon so look out for those, if you're interested please feel free to subscribe to my profile, I promise they'll be very cool! As usual, appreciate y'all to the moon and back, thanks for sticking around this long <3

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Chapter 48

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

He woke up on the downstairs couch, sunlight streaming in through the windows, covered by a blanket, still wearing his clothes from the previous night. He wrapped the blanket around his shoulders like a cape, wandering towards the kitchen and shoving the door open with his shoulder, Techno with his back to him standing over the stove.

“Did you want the... Oh hi Tommy!” Kristin poked her head out of the pantry, holding two jars in her hands, setting them down on the table. She looked a little pale, shawl wrapped around her shoulders, but she looked better than she had, and she wasted no time in making a beeline for him, pulling him into a hug. “Sleep well?”

“Yeah yeah.” He lingered for a few moments, and then wriggled free, sitting himself down on a chair. “Aren’t you still supposed to be on bed rest.” He muttered. She gathered her shawl around her, perching on the chair next to him.

“Oh I’m not doing much. I’m telling him what to do.”

Techno nodded sagely, measuring out spices into a small bowl. “Cooking by proxy.” Tommy squinted at the clock, rubbing his eyes.

“It’s like midday.” He complained. “Why didn’t you wake me up?”

“It’s 3pm, actually.” Techno corrected him. “We were out late last night, and you were deep asleep, Will wouldn’t let anyone near you.”

Kristin leaned over, passing him the bag of cereal, grabbing a bowl from the washing up tray and setting it down. “Was the couch comfortable?”

“Eh.” He shrugged. “Bit stiff. I’ll be fine.”

“I’d already carried you from the car, I wasn’t carrying you up the stairs as well.” Techno muttered. “Plus you snore.”

“Techno!” Kristin chided, not really meaning it at all.

“I’m so terribly sorry Ms Walters, I’ll never do it again.” He said dryly. She shook her head, turning back to Tommy.

“You’ve got work in an hour or so, don’t forget.”

“I know I know.” She passed him the milk, and he emptied half of it into his bowl, starting to Hoover it down hungrily.

“Slow down, you’ll choke.” He pulled a face at her, but slowed down a little, waiting until she turned the other way

“Where’s Will?” He asked through a mouthful of food.

“Out running errands, he’ll be back in a bit.” She turned back to Techno, carefully instructing him about something or another, walking him through it. He watched attentively, the two of them chatting back and forth comfortably about cooking and braising and a bunch of other words that meant nothing to him, dozing off a little in the warmth, watching them through lidded eyes.

The front door slammed with a loud thud, making his eyes fly open. “I’m back!” The kitchen door flew open seconds later. “Afternoon child.”

“Fuck off.” Tommy muttered. “We’re not going back to that.”

Will’s grin widened. “Yeah we are.”

“Nope. That phase was over and done with and we are done with it and no.”

“Will, your father’s trying to work.” Kristin said quietly. “Maybe tone it down a little.”

“Oops.” He looked over his shoulder a little guiltily and then kicked the door closed behind him, throwing the bag in his hand down on the table, passing Techno a packet of chicken, waving a tub of icecream at Tommy. “I got strawberry, you like strawberry right?” He got an indifferent shrug in response

“Yes he likes strawberry.” Kristin answered for him, shooting him a glare.

“Thanks Will.” He intoned.

“Tea for you.” He set down a box in front of her, and she snatched it up with glee, hopping off her stool to go fill the kettle. “And a newspaper for Dad.” He crumpled up the bag, stuffing it behind the door. “I didn’t forget anything did I?”

“I don’t think so.” Tommy snatched up the newspaper, flicking through it. Nothing jumped out, the usual bland news about Enforcer raids and some boat that overturned in the marina and some gang fights down in District 15. No mention of Tubbo, even though he’d been missing for multiple days now it hadn’t even touched the news.

“Could you take that to Phil?” Kristin asked. “You can read it after if you want.” He nodded, tucking it under his arm, abandoning the blanket on his chair, which was quickly stolen, his place filled by Will enthusiastically telling his brother about some near miss traffic accident he’d been involved in on the way back, the details probably only slightly embellished.

Phil was in his office, the door propped open adjacent to the lounge, papers spread all over the coffee table in front of him, poring over his laptop, glasses pushed on the end of his nose. Tommy poked his head around curiously, not having been in there much before.

The walls were covered in diagrams and design concepts of buildings. The shelf had pictures of his sons framed in pride of place, the three of them at a bowling alley, a younger, pleased Techno holding a certificate, Wilbur sat on the porch with his guitar, both of them at a birthday table, he couldn’t tell whose birthday it was. It was so very normal, just domestic photos like any other, a picture taken at a

country fair, school photo day, things any parent would have. Nothing gave a clue to who they were, who they'd become.

A pinboard on the other wall held something that drew his attention faster though, a large photo pinned dead centre showing the blackened remains of a street full of houses that looked vaguely familiar. "What's this?"

Phil started, as if he hadn't noticed him there, engrossed in his work. "Oh. They came in a few days ago, it's photos of the area that was damaged. I had surveyors go to check it out properly now it's mostly cleared up."

"How long?"

He hummed thoughtfully. "You're not going to like the answer."

"Just say it."

"It could be anything from a month to three months before we start building." He admitted. "You'll be here for a while."

Tommy deflated a little. Not as much as he used to, but still. "You're fucking kidding me. Why is it so long."

"There was pretty wide spread damage, about a hundred homes were lost in the end." He explained. "Before we can start building they need to clear everything up, which they're currently in the process off, we need all rubble off the site, we need to find where all the cables and water pipes are, that's not too hard but we also need to see the extent of the damage to them, how we're working them into the new designs. We need to acquire the materials for it, get investors on it." He paused. "Less of an issue with this one as we have government funding. Planning permission, it's a bunch of hoops to jump through, the rebuilding itself is just the tip of the iceberg."

"I remember absolutely none of that." Tommy told him honestly. "You just said a lot of words." Phil only chuckled, sitting back down again, studying his blueprint again. "Wouldn't that be easier on a computer, or something?"

"I like doing it the old-fashioned way." He began to mark tiny annotations down the side in neat handwriting, completely meaningless to Tommy no matter how much he squinted at them.

"Hah, old." He threw the newspaper down. "Delivery. Kristin said you had to read it before I could."

"Oh, thank you." He set it down next to him. "So, I heard you went to Haven again last night?" He said carefully

"I'm sorry I didn't know what else..." Phil waved him aside

"It's fine, the boys filled me in this morning, you did the right thing. It's a little unusual, but we'll make it work."

"You're not, I don't know, worried about having the president's son there?"

"Not particularly. If they couldn't find the others they can't find him either." He sat back, looking serious again. "I mean we'll keep an eye on him. We don't know if he's a threat, but Niki assures us

he isn't." There it was again, the old, tired glint of Thanatos that crossed his expression for just an instant. "We'll deal with things as they come."

"Kind of related, I mean not, but also yes. When am I going to meet Lethe and Atlas?" Tommy asked curiously. "I mean, I've seen Haven now, I've met everyone else, am I going to meet them?" Phil turned suddenly, startled.

"Atlas? Where did you hear that name?"

He glanced down, a little guilty. "Overheard you and Will." He admitted.

"Good, keep it that way, I don't need his involvement with us public." Phil said carefully. "As for Lethe, he's our spy." He grabbed a ruler, narrowing his eyes at the page. "Runs missions for us, stealing stuff from government buildings, planting devices and the like."

"Who's he?" He pushed, really not expecting an answer.

"He'll tell you who he is when he wants to." A half smile peaked at his mouth. "I'm not like Will, you can't get things from me that easily."

Tommy snickered, examining the rest of the wall. A large building stood out to him, covered in flowers, water features scattered around the grounds, encircled by gardens. The blueprints didn't make it look particularly exciting but he could almost visualize it. "What's this?"

"It's a project I worked on with Persephone shortly before she had to leave." Phil told him. "Affordable housing project, we called it Project Flowerfall, trying to increase city green spaces, because Manberg is miserable."

Tommy leaned his head on his hand, trying to make sense of the diagram. "Do you mean buildings or in general." There was a soft laugh from behind him.

"Yes."

"Tommy stop bothering Phil!"

"He's not bothering me." Phil called back.

"Tell him to ready for work!" She called back.

"Tell her the bus doesn't come for ages." He protested. Phil shook his head with a slight smile.

"Go talk to her yourself. I'm not being the go between." Tommy groaned, but wandered back out again.

"Bus doesn't come for ages!"

"It'll take you ages to get dressed and ready." She pointed out. "And Techno kindly offered to drive you, so you'd better be on time." He trailed upstairs, a string of protests in his wake, only drawing teasing laughter from the kitchen, the smell of frying onions and spice drifting up the stairs.

He stumbled back down half an hour later, hair freshly washed and dried, bag thrown over his shoulder. Techno was waiting for him, two lunch boxes held in his hand, rolling his eyes at the jacket the younger boy was wearing.

“What?” He asked defensively.

“Am I ever getting my jacket back?” He asked

“Mine now bitch.” He eyed the box suspiciously, and Techno handed it over. “What is that?”

“Just lemon chicken and pasta. Nothing fancy.” He stacked the second, larger box on top.

“Two?” Tommy gave him an odd look

He glanced down, frowning for a second. “Oh yeah, Kristin said to pack some for, for your friend as well.”

“Tell Ranboo I said hi!” She called out from the kitchen. “And check he’s eating enough.”

“Stop listening in creep!” Tommy called back. “And you can’t adopt him!” The sound of laughter drifted around the door. He stuffed the boxes in his bag, hoisting it on his shoulder. “Are we going now?”

“Whenever you’re ready. You got everything?”

“Yeah.” He patted his bag. “Actually, wait.” He dodged around the door, giving Kristin a quick hug. “See you later.” He chased Techno out, jumping in the front seat and pulling his phone out.

“So, did you burn the pasta? Is that why you gave it to me.” He said suspiciously

“I did not burn it.” Techno replied indignantly. “I’ve been cooking for years. And I’d give Will burned pasta if anything, because he’d eat it and not notice.”

Tommy smirked. “You should do that some time. To test it.”

“I’m not burning good food just to test Will.” He said flatly. “That’s an insult to the food.”

“You think potatoes are good food, shut up.”

“Have you ever had fries?”

Tommy paused. “Okay fine you might be right.” The elder simply nodded, looking pleased with himself, eyes on the road.

His communicator buzzed as they crossed midtown and he glanced down at it. “Can you drop me off round the back?”

“Sure?” He turned around, heading up another street. “Any reason why?”

Tommy shrugged, holding up his communicator. “No idea. They just told anyone arriving to go through the back.”

They turned up a narrow street, pulling into a small car park at the back, sandwiched in between the tower and a long low building that was used as a sort of laboratory. The equipment was mostly outdated, but it got the job done, and they didn't have the money to update it. Techno pulled into a spot closest to the building

"See you later." He pulled on a face mask, slipping out.

"Take care kid." Tommy was already slamming the door shut so he didn't get a rebuttal in time, so he just scowled at him through the window as he pulled away.

He barely made it inside the lobby before Ranboo appeared next to him, already in his suit, eyes wide. "Hey. Thank god you're finally here."

"You good? What the hell's going on?"

"The president, he's coming here." Tommy stared at him.

"He's here?"

"Well, not yet, but he will be."

"What the fuck?"

"You'd both better be on your best behaviour." Puffy joined them, looking stressed. "Have either of you seen Purpled, I need to talk to him."

Tommy shook his head, holding up his duffel bag. "Just got here. What..."

"I think he went off sulking." Spark strolled up, grinning from ear to ear. "He was here earlier."

"Sulking." The Captain raised an eyebrow at the smug expression. "What did you do?"

"Wasn't me." He held up his hands in defence, still grinning. "It was him." He pointed at Void.

"Void isn't ever the instigator." She said firmly. "I don't believe that for a minute."

"I mean kind of. We were training." Ranboo explained. "I lost but he wasn't happy about how well I did so he stormed off."

She rolled her eyes. "Of course. Send him my way if you see him." She trotted off and he turned on Ranboo.

"What's he doing here?" Tommy hissed, dropping his voice. "He never comes here."

He nodded warily, eyes darting around as if he'd appear from anywhere. "Is that significant?"

"What the hell do you mean is that significant? Schlatt? Visiting the Agency? Visiting somewhere meta's work? He's never been here."

"Oh, I'm dumb." Void just shrugged. "I don't have a clue, we were training, I walked out of the training hall and the Captain said not to go out front because security and press are setting up, and

told us to be ready and looking our best and not to try anything.”

Tommy shuddered. “Fuck no I don’t have a death wish?” Ranboo gave him a look. “Oh fuck you. I’m not dead am I.”

“You might want to go get changed.” Spark interrupted. “The Warden’s in a bad mood, if you’re not ready he’ll get pissed.”

He didn’t need any more convincing, disappearing into the changing rooms, reappearing a few minutes later to stuff his things away, only for the Warden to spot them immediately. “You four, upstairs to the meetings room.” He ordered. “I want you out of sight.”

“But.” Spark tried, but he didn’t get any further

“Go.” He snapped. They started into motion without another word, even Spark wise enough to catch onto the tone

“Man, someone got out of the wrong side of the bed this morning.” He muttered.

“Doesn’t he always?” Purple added

“He didn’t used to.” Tommy glanced over his shoulder. “He’s normally nicer than this. Don’t know why he won’t let us stay.”

Spark paused just before the next flight of stairs. “We could watch from the balcony.”

“You’re just asking to get in trouble.” Purpled said sarcastically. “I’m in.”

“I. I don’t think it’s a great idea.” Void said cautiously. “I don’t want to mess with the Warden right now.”

“Aw come on.” Spark folded his arms. “I want to be on TV. Theseus?” Tommy cast an apologetic glance at Ranboo.

“I kind of want to see this.” He admitted. “We can hide pretty well, no one will know.”

“They’ll see us leaving.”

“Not if you take us.” Purpled suggested. Void wavered, but gave in, pushing the door open to the high left balcony, keeping to the shadows.

The lobby was a rush of frenzied activity, people hurrying back and forth tidying up, all kinds of important looking people filling in. Tommy didn’t pay them any attention, gaze lingering on the Archangel statue on the far wall.

He hadn’t given it much thought lately, but it stood out to him again. He tried to find Phil’s features in the part of the face he could see, tracing the outlines of the wings, spread out defiantly, the stance, shoulders back. If he squinted close enough, it made sense.

Unless you knew, you'd never connect the dots, but there it was, the structure of his head, the wayward hair, and a few other things he couldn't quite put a name to, but seemed familiar. He almost laughed, the irony somehow bitter to taste, having grown up with an idol he spoke to less than an hour ago.

He was so drawn in he almost missed the president's entrance. He strode in surrounded by a security detail, the Warden moving forward to greet him, the other heroes scattered around the lobby, either scattered up the stairs or around the balcony areas.

They met in the centre, press flooding in, cameras were flashing in his face as the president reached out, shaking the Warden's hand, a rush of noise sweeping up the walls, clicking flashes and chattering voices. Despite the gravity of the situation, it all seemed to go over his head.

He felt very isolated all of a sudden, a cold feeling in his chest. The irony sharpened as the motionless statue of Archangel, of Thanatos watched the president cross the floor. An effigy of the Syndicate leader, and none of them had a clue, not that he was alive, or had been one of them.

Not that Tommy was here now, in the middle of it all, holding the secret to the end of a war, the last place anyone would expect it. He almost laughed at that. In the end he was more like Archangel than he ever knew.

Spark leaned closer, intrigued by the scene below as they began to exchange words. "That's going to be all over the newspapers tomorrow."

"Yeah." Tommy nodded slowly, breaking out of his train of thought. "This is pretty crazy."

"Wonder whose soul he had to sell for Schlatt to agree to this." Purpled said coldly. "He's been avoiding this place like the plague." Spark hushed him quickly, even though they were far out of earshot.

"We should go." Ranboo suggested. "Before we get seen."

"Hey that camera's looking at us." Spark nudged him, pointing down. "Smile and wave boys."

"We're not supposed to be drawing attention." Void hissed.

"Bit late for that." He waved enthusiastically, Purpled giving an indifferent nod. Tommy just raised a hand, grinning at it, before grabbing Ranboo's arm. They blinked out of existence, reappearing in the meeting room.

"Can't believe I'm being used as a glorified lift." Void complained. "This is so rude."

"You're starting to sound like Theseus." Spark hopped up onto the side. "You better watch out."

Void shuddered dramatically, earning a round of laughter.

"What do you think he's here to do? He must have some reason." Tommy asked. "Surely he's getting something out of this."

"He must be." Purpled agreed. "I just don't know what."

"I mean if you wait they might tell us?" Ranboo reasoned

“Nah. Sounds cringe.”

“Yeah, boring.” Spark agreed.

The door swung open suddenly and the president strode in, followed close behind by a few officials and the Warden, the others trailing in behind. The four of them jumped off the tables, standing up, instinctively spreading out a little to draw less attention, giving Tommy a chance to get a closer look.

Now up close, Schlatt looked unusually disheveled, bags under his eyes carefully hidden with a dust of makeup, hair ruffled.

His eyes snapped up to the four of them in the corner. “Are you intending to let the apprentices stay?” He asked coldly. The Warden hesitated for a split second, clearly having assumed they’d be in the meeting but he shook his head, giving them a meaningful glance towards the door. Spark grumbled quietly but did so, the others trailing after him.

“Theseus can stay.” The president said suddenly. “He’ll want to hear this.” The words registered slowly. Tommy stopped, sticking his tongue out at Spark before turning back around to face the table neatly, a little nervous. “Come up to the table. No point hiding over there.” The president sounded oddly calm, almost approachable. Tommy didn’t trust it one bit, looking around warily, stepping closer.

“You’re not in trouble.” The Warden told him quickly. “It just concerns you.”

“I’m definitely concerned right now.” He muttered. Oddly enough, it earned a slight smile from the otherwise tense president. Schlatt declined the offered seat, opting to remain standing.

“Very well, I’ll keep this brief. My son has been taken. I want him back, and I’m willing to team up with the Agency if it allows me to do so.” He said bluntly. “If this seems unusual to you, It seems a fair assumption to make that those who took him harbour some kind of ill will against this administration, so it’s within my best interests to do anything in my power to see him safe.”

“What do you think they took him for?”

“Politics.” He said grimly. “Some kind of game they want to play, I assume. I fear they will try and use him to hold some kind of leverage over me. Should that come to pass, I will be forced to step down, I’m not choosing between my position and my son.” He said firmly. “But I’d rather not be faced with that decision in the first place.”

“I can’t imagine how hard this must be for you right now.” The Captain said kindly. “We’ll do everything we can.”

“Thank you.” His eyes scanned every one of their faces one by one. “Make no mistake, I will leave no stone unturned, and anyone who helps return him to me will have my eternal gratitude. Anyone who keeps him from me, they will suffer every hell our justice system has to offer.” He let the words hang in the air for a few, long, uncomfortable seconds, before looking down at Tommy.

“You were friends with my son.” The Warden shot Tommy a warning look. One hand was hovering near his trident, unconsciously protective.

“I. Yes, but we haven’t spoken lately.” Tommy said, after a slight pause. “It’s kind of hard for us to stay in contact, cos I work a lot.”

“When was the last time you spoke?” His heart was pounding at a hundred miles an hour. He didn’t know, he couldn’t know.

“Uh, at the speeches sir.” He replied, almost stumbling over the words. “I haven’t heard anything since then but I didn’t think it was weird as we can’t talk all the time.”

“I see.” He turned away, disinterested, addressing the Warden again and Tommy felt a wave of relief.

He fell back, half planning to take his phone out and try and sneak a text to Wilbur about what was happening, but he didn’t get the chance. A security guard strode in, making eye contact with the president, hurrying over. Schlatt stepped back, leaning an ear towards him, brow furrowed. The guard whispered something into his ear and he looked up sharply. “I’m sorry?”

“Sir you need to leave.” He repeated. “Lethe has been sighted in the building.”

Chapter End Notes

First off, thank you for 20K hits, that's insane!

Sorry for the break in uploads, assignment week and just being tired slowed me down, but I'm hoping to get back on track now. This is now the penultimate arc of WHT, so it could be over as early as the end of March, which is a lot to process but don't worry, I'll have plenty more projects to come afterwards, as well as a few I'm working on at the moment for the Quill SMP, so watch out for those

As always, thank you for all the support, you guys make my day. <3

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Man these poltergeists are wild

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

The Warden's eyes widened a little behind his mask. "Captain."

"On it." She confirmed, barely hesitating. "Agency folk out, Android put this room on lockdown behind us." The cyborg nodded once in confirmation, watching as they streamed out of the room.

"Come on Theseus. Move." Blaze hurried him out, the Captain following, Android falling into place in front of the doors, a wicked serrated knife unfolding from his metal arm as it closed behind him, locking shut.

"Void and Spark, cover the exits of the building." She relayed into her earpiece. "If you see him get away, you chase him, but do not engage." She trotted down the stairs, Supreme running up to meet her, looking out of breath.

"Captain!"

"Where is he?" She interrupted. "Give me the short version."

"He wasn't making any effort to hide." Ponk reported. "He took down two Enforcers by the entrance and then dipped. Dunno where he went."

"Are they alright?"

"Unconscious, they both took heavy blows but not dead. Lethe didn't seem to want to kill them."

Blaze and Puffy shared a look. "I don't know if that's good or not." He said finally.

"It means he's after someone else. This is bad." She replied. "Supreme get upstairs and stay by the president, I'll order Android to let you in. Nothing can happen to him, understood?"

Ponk wavered, and then nodded, running up the stairs. She checked her communicator, looking around anxiously. "Goddamnit where is Purpled."

"What do you mean?" Punz joined them. "I saw him a second ago."

"He's supposed to be on perimeter but he's not showing up." She tapped the screen, turning her wrist to show him a map, tagged with all of their names. Purpled's tag was nowhere to be seen.

"I would be worried but it's Purpled, he's probably just late." Blaze said irritably. The Captain didn't look reassured.

"He's not answering messages either. With a member of the Syndicate running free around the building I'm not writing anything off."

Tommy lingered just close enough that he could hear what was going on, checking his own tracking map to confirm. Void was somewhere outside, standing in one of the alleyways, Spark on the other

side of the building, even 404 was there, despite taking the early morning shift, but sure enough no sign of Purpled.

“He was with us, he was in the meeting room.” He piped up. “He can’t have gone too far.” She pressed her lips together.

“We’ll see. Alright, you two, sweep the upper floors, don’t leave anything unturned, we can’t afford to mess this up.” She pointed at Punz and Blaze, the urgency starting to sink in. “Theseus search the basement, if any of you see Purpled tell him to get on the perimeter before the Warden notices he’s gone.”

He spun on his heels, heading over to a door on the far side that was hidden a little in the shadows, behind the reception desk. He hadn’t really been in the basement much, aside from once or twice a year when it was all hands on deck to either get Christmas decorations up or take them down.

The memories were bittersweet, but for a different reason now, tarnished by a lifetime that had happened in the space of a year or so. Things had been so much less complicated back then, he almost missed it, dragging everything down, working with Android to get it up on the shelves, the cyborg lifting it with his strength, Tommy using his powers to stack it on the shelves, bickering with him as they went.

It was huge, almost a hall of sorts, lined with floor to ceiling shelves stacked with any and everything they didn’t need the rest of the time, Christmas decorations, junk, old computer parts, training equipment and god knows what else, dark, and echoey, heavy with dust and that old stale smell every storage room seemed to have.

His footsteps echoed on the concrete floor, an odd chill in the air as he walked deeper and deeper into it, the rectangle of light cast through the doorway drawing further away behind him

Something clattered to the floor around the corner. He slowed, creeping across the floor, one hand going to his belt. A hand grabbed his wrist, yanking him back behind a shelf and he opened his mouth to cry for help.

“Hey, stop that!” Purpled ducked into his field of view, letting go of his arm. “You’ll get us caught.”

“Purpled? What the hell are you doing?” He hissed, just short of screaming the house down.

“Shut up.” He muttered. “You’ll give my hiding spot away.”

“Hiding spot?” He looked around. It wasn’t much more than a gap in the shelves, just big enough for the both of them. Purpled leaned against the shelves.

“Yeah. My hiding spot.” He looked up. “You can sit down if you want, don’t just stand there,”

“I thought you were Lethe.” Tommy pressed a hand to his chest, breathing hard. “You fucking scared me man.” Purpled just laughed. “Speaking of, are you searching down here or something?”

“Nah.” He looked completely indifferent to the chaos that had just taken place. “We just sit here, and we let it happen.”

“But Schlatt...”

“I don’t care. I don’t give a damn about Schlatt. Whatever Lethe’s doing, I’m not going to stop him, and you shouldn’t either.” A sudden intensity entered his voice, a change from the normal flat tone he liked to use. Tommy sat up, paying him more attention.

“The Warden...”

“Doesn’t give a shit,” He cut him off again, not even looking up. “I don’t care if you like him, in fact you’re fucking stupid if you still trust him. He deserves whatever’s coming to him.” He crouched on the ground, pulling one of his knives out, spinning it in his fingers restlessly. “We’re best off here, let the others do the work if they want to.”

“What about Spark and Void?” He argued, knowing full well the older boy had made his mind up, and once that had happened he couldn’t be shifted.

“Well if they drop by they can join the party.” He said indifferently.

“If anything happens they’ll get mad at the Warden, we have to help.” Purpled snorted, sitting down properly, kicking his legs up on a box.

“Yeah the daddy issues are looking great on you right now.”

“Shut the fuck up.” Tommy snarled. “You’re being a right dickhead right now.”

“I’m doing you and myself a favour. The Enforcers are ready to fire at anything that moves, if I take you back home in a body bag your mum will kick my ass.”

“Is this where you were when you didn’t turn up to the hospital?” He shot back, letting more than a little venom slip into his voice. “Hiding down here.”

“Hey. That was something else.” He said defensively. “I didn’t mean to.”

“We all managed to turn up on time.”

“Well, you didn’t have a run in with Jester on the way and have to get him and his goons to fuck off.” He snapped finally, clearly at the end of his leash with that kind of comment. “And I’m not explaining that to the Warden.”

“Jester? The guy that shot me?” Tommy asked, confused

“The what now?” Purpled stared at him. “That was him?”

“Well, not directly him.” Tommy said, “But yeah, back when me and Ranboo busted that gang trade, you know, the night before the hospital attack.”

Purpled’s eyes widened a little. “Oh that was him. Shiiiiit. That’s not good. How do you know about him?” He pushed. “Where did you hear that name?”

“Void recognised him, I don’t know, what’s the big deal?” He answered, confused.

“Oh. That makes sense.”

“Why the fuck does that make sense.” He exclaimed, frustrated. “Stop being so goddamn cryptic for once in your life.”

Purpled shot him a white-toothed smile, leaning back against the pallets. “No.”

“Forget this.” Tommy pushed past. “You can stay here, I’ve got work to do.” He heard sniggering behind him. “Don’t laugh at me, don’t you care.”

“Theseus I’m seventeen, you’re nearly seventeen as well, it shouldn’t be our job.” He replied. “It’s not work, if they want to make kids look for terrorists that’s not my problem.”

“Theseus!” The Captain’s voice came in over his earpiece before he got the chance to reply. “Theseus where are you?”

“I’m here.” He escaped the last part of the shelf, trotting out into the aisleway. “Why? Where are you?”

“You need to get out, now. I’m by the basement door. Are you alright?” She appeared at the entrance way, running in to meet them.

“I’m fine.” He reassured her quickly. “What’s the matter?”

“We think he’s down here, we’ve swept the rest of the building. You need to get out.”

“I found Purpled.” He blurted. “He was searching down here as well, we thought we saw something.”

Purpled appeared next to him, casting him a small, annoyed glance but not for long, he knew perfectly well Tommy had just covered for him in a pretty big way as they approached the door.

Puffy gave him half a suspicious glance but dismissed it, more important things on her mind. “Come on. We need to get out of here.” She turned away.

Purpled tapped his wrist, nodding slightly upwards. Tommy raised his head a little to follow his gaze. Their eyes had adjusted more to the darkness than the Captain’s had so they saw what she’d missed.

A dark figure, crouched on the highest shelves above them, almost completely concealed by shadows, perfectly still.

The mask turned slowly, a sudden stark white against the darkness, making direct eye contact with him, and a shiver ran down his spine.

“Not a word,” Purpled murmured. “You saw nothing, remember.”

“Wasn’t planning to.” He whispered back. “Let’s go.”

They reached the door, a squadron of Enforcers waiting outside, armoured and holding guns, faces hidden behind tinted riot masks. The Captain nodded to them in confirmation of something. “They

think they saw something.”

“Did you see where he went?” The leader demanded, his rank denoted by a silver stripe on his sleeve. Tommy didn’t respond, not knowing what to say.

“Theseus? Did you see where he went?” The Captain prompted

“No.” He said quickly, a little too quickly but they didn’t seem to notice. “No, we just saw movement we didn’t see anything else.”

“Get upstairs.” She ordered. “Don’t come down here, if you see anything let me know.” He didn’t hesitate, taking the stairs two at a time, the other boy right on his heels, bursting back into the lobby.

Purpled let out a long breath. “I see why they call him the Ghost.”

“How long was he there?” Tommy whispered. “How much did he overhear?”

“Eh, he can overhear what he wants.” He said indifferently. “What’s he going to do, tell the Warden.”

That dragged out a small smile. “Fair point.”

“On another note. The Theseus I knew would have handed him in in a heartbeat.” Purpled turned serious with no warning. “What happened to you?”

“I mean I still can.” Tommy rose to the defence immediately. “Just watch me.”

“You won’t.” He stuffed his hands in his pockets. “I know what you look like when you want something done, I can’t just talk you out of it. If you wanted to turn him in, you would have, what’s up with that?”

“I thought this was what you wanted? Not to hand him in?” He said, frustrated. “What else do you want from me.”

“You’re acting weird.” Purpled narrowed his eyes at him. “I want to know why. I want to know what changed.”

“There were like twenty Enforcers there.” He said after a bit. “Doesn’t matter what we say, they’ll find him, they’ll drive him out. It’s over.”

“Whatever you say.” He turned away before Tommy could issue a retort, walking away across the lobby.

There were distant shouts and crashes from the basement door. He leaned a little closer, straining his ears but there was nothing more. The Captain emerged a few minutes later, looking annoyed.

“Did you get him?” He asked. The answer was written all over her face but he wanted to hear it anyway as the squad of Enforcers spilled out of the stairwell behind her, spreading out across the lobby.

“No luck.” She said, frustrated. “He’s taunting us, we saw him for a second, and then he was gone.”

“He can’t have left the building.” Void reported. “Neither me or Spark have seen anything.”

“Yeah he’s still inside,” Spark confirmed. Wind buffeted his mic, making it a little hard to hear. “That or he’s managed to slip past us, which is possible.”

“I doubt it, he seems pretty set on whatever he’s here to do.” She closed her eyes. “We’ll have to wait him out, keep it up, make it as hard for him to move as we can. Blaze I’m heading up to you.”

“Sounds good.” She ran off up the stairs, and Tommy watched her go.

The Theseus I knew would have handed him in in a heartbeat . He hated how true that was, he hated that Purpled was right. Once upon a time he would have thrown himself at the figure hiding on the shelf top, angry and elated to tackle a Syndicate member head-on.

Once upon a time he would have demanded to go back down, to be a part of the search party, to do something to help. Now he was indifferent, if it wasn’t for the threat of Schlatt’s anger hanging over his head he’d have stayed with Purpled without another word.

The statue stood over him, wings spread, a guardian angel at his shoulder, and he drew a strange kind of courage from it, looking up into Archangel’s stone features.

He waited until the lobby was empty, the Enforcers streaming upstairs, or outside to surround the building, leaving it oddly silent. The lights had powered off at some point, casting the room into a half-darkness, barricades outside the doors. He didn’t look back, plunging down into the depths of the basement once again, closing the door behind him.

They’d left a mess behind, boxes had been tossed around without care, their contents scattered all over the floor or broken in their rush to drive him out. He stepped over a pool of spilled tennis balls, picking his way in between an easter basket and spilled paper, the basket smashed up, remains of plastic eggs tumbling out.

“I know you’re here.” He called out to the empty air. “You can come out, they’ve left and there’s no cameras down here, but you probably know that already.”

There was no answer. He walked further in, eyes darting left and right. A strange feeling crawled up his back, like eyes burning into him. He spun around, but there was nothing there, perhaps a flicker far up but fast enough that he most likely imagined it.

Doubt began to creep in, maybe he had left after all, maybe this was all for nothing, or there was someone else in the darkness, ready to out him as a spy. He began to rehearse lines in his head, lies about trying to lure the Ghost out, make a trap, the kind of reckless behaviour the Warden would expect from him, anything at all.

He reached the end of an aisle stacked with somewhat worn Christmas decorations, a battered-looking plastic tree shoved onto the shelves, with a box of cheap lights, the lid covered in a thin layer of dust. He ran his finger through it, back deliberately turned to the hall.

Wind whispered past his ear. There was an odd feeling behind him, like the emptiness had been filled. A dark shape appeared, reflected in the curved plastic of one of the ornaments, oddly distorted. He blinked, and it was gone again. Goosebumps ran up his spine, his burst of courage rapidly fading.

“I know you’re there.” He raised his voice a little. “Come back. It’s not a trap, I just want to talk. I want answers.” There was no reply, because of course there wasn’t. He gave it a few, long seconds, silently crossing his fingers, hoping against hope it would work.

The dead air shifted again. He turned on his heel slowly, holding his breath.

Lethe stood opposite him, cloaked in shadows, keeping a wary distance. He took a step forward and Tommy jumped, automatically on high alert, a plank of wood flying up from the ground towards the villain. He seemed to blip out of existence, reappearing in the same spot, wincing slightly as the plank hit the shelves behind him with a loud clatter that echoed through the hall.

“I thought you might come back.” His voice was odd, muffled, echoing behind the mask, a strange, strained note to it. “I’m not here to hurt you.”

“You can talk.” Tommy lowered his guard, taken aback. “Since when could you talk?” He reached for his staff on instinct, but Lethe held a hand out.

“I’m not your enemy.” He took a step towards him. Tommy backed away, waving his hands.

“No, no, you stay where you are. I came for answers, we’re not playing this by your rules.” His fists tightened around the staff.

“Tommy stop.” There was a kind of firm finality to that. He froze, staring at the empty mask.

“What did you say?”

Lethe reached up, hand still outstretched warily. “Listen to me.” He repeated. “I’m not going to hurt you.”

“You couldn’t if you tried bitch.” His heart was pounding, whether with fear or just plain adrenaline he didn’t know. He moved back, his foot hitting the shelf. He was trapped, Lethe in the entrance of the aisle, only shelves and walls behind him.

“I can give you your answers. I need you to trust me.” The Ghost tried again, as calm and reassuring as he could, not that it did much to settle the other.

“Why the fuck would I trust you? I don’t fucking know you.”

Lethe sighed. “Fine. We’ll do this the other way.” He lowered his hood, reaching for his mask. Tommy inhaled sharply, but he wasn’t fast enough. Lethe pulled it away, clipping it onto his belt, raising his head to look him in the eyes. The last of his courage all but deserted him.

“This is a joke right. This is a joke.” Tommy whispered. The colour had all but drained from his face. “I don’t...”

“Hello Theseus.” He responded, unwavering.

“You’re not. You can’t be, this is some kind of joke.” He stammered, backing away towards the shelves. “You’re... You’re not Lethe, you’re not him.”

“Techno chose it for me, it’s not an exact match, but secrets, concealment, forgetfulness as well, he thought that was quite funny,” Ranboo said quietly. “It’s nice to finally meet you.”

Chapter End Notes

I don't make everything impossible to guess. Y'all did well on this one, you picked up a lot of clues, but wow was it hard to keep it under wraps for this long.

As usual, appreciate y'all to the moon and back and thank you so much for all the recent support, it just means everything.

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Chapter 50

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

For the first time in a long time, Tommy was speechless. Lethe watched him carefully, waiting for a word, a reaction of any kind.

“I’m sorry.” He said quietly. “I wanted to tell you, but it was never the right time.”

“All this time.” Tommy’s voice crackled a little. “I trusted you.”

“I’m sorry.” He repeated. “I didn’t want this.”

“You could trust me! Why didn’t you trust me! I don’t even care about the Syndicate, not anymore which...which if you know Techno you’d know.” Pieces were starting to fall into place alarmingly fast. “Which means they know you, which means...”

“Don’t think about it too much right now, we agreed it was my place to tell you.” Ranboo said firmly. “You needed to hear it from me. It wasn’t about you, or trust.” He said simply. “I couldn’t tell anyone, it was too much risk.”

“So that’s how they got their information.” He realised. “It was you.”

Ranboo inclined his head. “No one would suspect me.”

“Why would you do this! You know the Syndicate is dangerous!”

“Am I dangerous?”

There was a heavy silence, the words ringing across the space between them. “Yeah, kinda.” Tommy admitted. “When you use it right, definitely, and probably more than you ever let me know *Lethe* .”

“I’m sorry Tommy.” He held his hands out helplessly. “I never wanted to lie to you.”

“But you did. So how much of it was real?” He demanded. “Cos this doesn’t even feel real.”

“Of what?”

“All of this. You’ve been lying to me for so long, how much was ever real?” He pressed.

Ranboo sighed. “I might not have told you the truth about why I was here but that wasn’t because of you, that was because it could have gotten me and many other people killed. And if I was found out, as close to you as I was, they wouldn’t wait to see if you were innocent, you know that.”

“I don’t know anything apparently, not even you.” He shot back bitterly

“You do.” He answered with a kind of firm conviction that Tommy wanted to believe so very badly. “You know me better than most people. You know me better than I ever meant you to.”

“You were one of the only people I had.” Tommy whispered. “You were the last person I trusted, you were the last one, the only one who hadn’t lied to me. Why? Why.”

Ranboo’s eyes clouded a little. He pulled the mask back on, pulling his hood up, hiding his expression. “Oh Tommy.”

“I don’t want your fucking pity.” He said through gritted teeth. “Oh poor Theseus, so fucking naïve Theseus, grieving a woman who *isn’t even dead* which you must have known, poor Theseus, doesn’t know he’s leaking information to a *spy*, poor fragile Theseus gets lead around by the fucking head because I had the audacity to put my whole heart and faith in the people I trust only for *both* of my closest friends to turn out to have befriended me for their own interests. Don’t you dare give me your fucking pity.”

“Let me explain.” Ranboo begged, “Please. Give me that much.”

“You have one minute.” He said fiercely. “One minute, to justify it all.”

Lethe sighed, collecting himself for a moment. “Right. From the beginning, I’m not doing this out of spite, I’ve been with the Syndicate for a long time. I joined the Tower as a spy but I never used you for information, I tried to never lie to you, whatever I said it was pretty much what I knew at the time. My reason for being here might not be genuine, but my friendship with you wasn’t ever fake, and wasn’t ever for information, I have plenty of ways to get that without you.” He insisted. “I mean, you could be really annoying sometimes but you were kind, in your own way.”

“What do you mean, ‘in your own way’.”

Lethe shrugged. “I don’t know.” He waved his hand vaguely at Tommy. “You’re just you.”

Tommy laughed coldly. “That’s all you have to say?”

“I tried to tell you, I really did, I dropped hints while we were researching, I tried to bring you around, I took you to the riot, I showed you the video of the Enforcers setting the police station fire.” He took a step towards him, hands held out in a show of good faith, desperately trying to get through to him. “I found that by the way, I leaked that and you were one of the first people I showed. I tried to show you both sides, but you’re the definition of a one-track mind.” He said wryly, “It’s very hard to shift your focus.”

“Right and...”

“We don’t have time.” Ranboo cut him off. “They’re going to realise they can’t find Lethe any minute, and I don’t know how much longer I can throw them off by leaving my tracker in the alleyway, if someone finds it the whole game is up. I promise I’ll answer more later but we can’t right now.”

“What are you doing here then? Seems like a weird time for a face reveal.” Tommy said sarcastically.

“I need your help.” He admitted at length. “I- I wasn’t ready for how many people they’ve deployed, or how prepared they’d be for me.”

“What can I even do to help?” Tommy folded his arms. “Why ask, you know, the naïve idiot with a one-track mind, why not literally anyone else?”

“I’ll explain everything.” Ranboo promised. “I’ll let you ask anything you want to, please.”

“I mean I’d expect that anyway.” He said flatly. “What the hell are you planning?”

A flash drive appeared in one gloved hand. “I need to get this into the Warden’s office, I need to hear what he’s discussing with Schlatt, the Syndicate has to know.”

“You want me to help you spy on the Warden?”

“He knows something.” Lethe explained. “We don’t know what, but something is going on with them both, and we need to find out. Either it’s nothing important, and we leave it, or it’s something that involves the city, and meta’s futures, and we need to know as soon as we can.”

“What do you want me to do?”

“I just need you to let me know when and if they’re distracted or not in the room. I’ll teleport in and out, no one will know. Please.” He looked oddly vulnerable, hand outstretched. “It’s alright if you don’t want a part of this, just say no, I can’t make you, but I need you, it’s not a lot.”

Tommy looked down, staring at the concrete floor, at the communicator on his wrist, anything but make eye contact. He wanted to lash out, to shout and push and just scream about how it was all so unfair, so cruel that it had to be him, that it was always him, that he never asked for any of this. Over and over again he found himself here, a friend turned enemy holding out a white flag, a lifeline, and still he couldn’t bring himself to hate them, not when he wanted to cling onto that line with all he was worth. “I could call for help now.” He threatened instead.

Ranboo looked at the ground. “Yeah. You could.”

“What would you do?”

“I would leave.” He said quietly. “Change back into Void, try and pretend nothing happened.”

“I could tell them.”

“Would they believe you?” He asked bleakly.

“They might do. Or they’ll think I’m crazy but you know.” He mulled it over, staring at the boy opposite him. “You’re not giving me any choice, I can’t turn you in.”

“You’ll help me?” Ranboo breathed.

“I’ll do it. But if I get caught, I’m taking you down with me.” He threatened. “You need me, if you do it on your own you’ll fuck it up, so you’re lucky I’m in a good mood today.”

“If they get you I’m getting you out, I won’t let anything happen to you.” Ranboo promised, and Tommy believed him. “We’re out of time. I gotta go.” He vanished, and Tommy ran back towards the door, hurrying up the stairwell before he was seen.

He was out of luck. The Captain was pacing back and forth on the lobby floor, spotting him the moment he emerged. “What are you doing down there?” She demanded. “We searched there already, if you went hunting after him Theseus I swear...”

“I don’t know, I wasn’t given anywhere to go so I just kept patrolling the basement.” He lied quickly. She looked a little closer.

“Are you alright? You look pale.”

He couldn’t meet her gaze, eyes fixed on the floor. “All the Enforcers are making me nervous.” It was true enough. He barely stopped to think about how good he’d become at lying. Well, good was questionable, but good by his standards

Void appeared next to them a few seconds later, no sign of the Lethe uniform at all, nodding to the Captain. “You wanted me?”

“You hadn’t moved for a bit, wanted to check you were still alive, Spark couldn’t see you.”

“Oh, sorry, I don’t know why that was.” The words slid out without hesitation. He would have believed him, he wanted to believe him, twenty minutes ago he would have. His world shattered a little further, a thousand innocent sentences hanging before his eyes, ready to fall apart just like that one had, but it was too late now.

“Alright, Void, keep me updated. Theseus if you’re not doing anything else come up to the meeting room.” She began to walk away, and Ranboo moved as if to teleport again. The Archangel statue seemed to hang over them, eyes burning into his back.

He grabbed Void’s wrist. “Wait.” The words spilled out before he’d really thought them through, reckless and impulsive, but getting away with the lie made him bold, the shreds of a plan forming in his head. Ranboo glanced down, confused.

“You good?” He asked carefully

“Give me that.” He held his hand out for the flash drive.

“I-...”

“I don’t care. The Warden trusts me, I can do this.” Ranboo blinked owlshly.

“You. Wait. You’re... actually offering to help?”

“Isn’t that what you wanted?” He said defensively.

“I don’t know if this is a good idea.”

“I can’t stop you.” Tommy explained. “And I can’t turn you in, but you’re going to get caught if you do it, there’s no way you can teleport in and out without being detected, so you’re going to give it to me and you’re going to walk out of here.” He sounded much more sure than he felt.

“There’s no point turning me in. Just so you know.”

“I just fucking said I’m not going to.” He held out his hand. “Give it to me.”

“Why are you doing this?” Ranboo look “This feels too easy.”

“If you get caught they’ll suspect me too, I don’t know, what do you want me to say?” He asked.

“Look, I do this, you meet me on the OTV tower after work, same place we went during the curfew. You answer *everything* I want to know, deal?”

“In the kindest way possible, you’re not really subtle.” Void said warily. “You can’t get this into the computer without getting caught, there’s not a chance.”

“I don’t even need to go near it.” Tommy stated, the realisation hitting him as he said it, a proper plan forming. “Telekinetic, remember. I can be on the other side of the room. Now hand it over, we don’t have much time.”

He hesitated, and for a moment Tommy didn’t think it worked. Then he let the flash drive slip slowly through his fingers. He snatched it out of the air, a little surprised. “That was easier than I thought.”

“I can’t stop you when you’re set on something. And.” Ranboo chewed his lip nervously. “And even if you don’t trust me, I trust you.”

“Well, we’ll see if that’s a stupid idea or not.” He pocketed it.

“Theseus hurry up!” The Captain called from the stairs. “We need to go.”

“What do I need to do?” He hissed. “Quickly.”

“Get it into the meeting room computer, as hidden as you can, it’ll do the rest.” Void explained. “Go. And stay safe.”

“Get back to your post before you get caught.” He said, turning away. He didn’t look back, if he looked back, he’d knew he’d lose his nerve.

He’d seen Haven, he’d heard their side of the story, and he trusted them, even if it wasn’t something he felt he could be a part of. He felt betrayed, and hurt, and lost, but out of sheer spite he wouldn’t let them take Ranboo. That was it, out of spite, nothing else, and if he repeated it enough he could convince himself. He caught up to the Captain, falling at her side, following her up

“Captain, any luck?” Android’s voice made him jump.

“Uh, no, none. Can you let us past?”

“I’m not supposed to be letting anyone in.”

“It’s me you dingbat.” She said affectionately. “Let us in, argue with the Warden if you have to.” Android gave her a quick once over, and then nodded, opening the door a tiny bit. He slipped in behind her before he could protest.

Schlatt was sat at the head of the table, surrounded by his entourage, the Warden stood off to the side. He felt like an outsider all of a sudden, they’d let the enemy in and they didn’t have a clue.

He’d done it, he’d actually done it, though he wasn’t even quite sure what he’d just agreed to. It was a spur-of-the-moment decision, and the dread was starting to sink in, but at the same time, he felt powerful for the first time, Schlatt didn’t have the same effect on him when he held his downfall in his pocket.

“Captain?” The president addressed her first. His eyes lingered on Tommy for a few seconds before dragging away, and he tightened his fingers around the flash drive.

“Nothing.” She relayed. “A few glimpses of him we think but nothing else. My best guess is this is some kind of show of strength, that we can’t keep him out.”

“There’s no such thing as a false alarm with Lethe.” Schlatt looked furious, thinly concealed beneath a veneer of exhaustion. “He’s up to something, I guarantee it.”

“Perhaps if we had information on his other...escapades, we might be able to form a proper opinion of that.” The Warden said carefully but the president just waved him aside.

“Another time.”

“We’ve done everything we can.” The Captain continued. “The rest is up to the Enforcers, if they can’t find anything no one can.” Each word was carefully chosen to deescalate anything before it happened, all eyes on the president in case of an outburst but it didn’t come. He turned away, muttering to an aide.

No one was looking at one apprentice, face drawn pale in the corner, no one saw as he slipped the flash drive out, holding it in his fingers for a few seconds. A tiny, plain thing, it felt so insignificant compared to what he was risking for it. Red light spun around it, and it floated out of his hand, shooting under the table towards the computer

The Warden took a step back towards Tommy, lowering his voice, leaning on his trident. “Are you alright? You seem out of sorts.”

“I’m fine.” Tommy mumbled, trying not to look at it.

“I’m sorry it hasn’t been easy lately, I’ve had a lot on my mind, but things are looking up now.” He said reassuringly. “We’re doing better than we ever have. This is just a temporary setback.”

He felt a brief stab of guilt. For a moment he was a year younger again, turning up on his first day at the Agency, fresh out of school and thrown into a world much bigger than himself. The Warden was a constant, he always had been.

Some part of him hoped this would clear his name, a little, hopeful part that said whatever was going on, Sam had nothing to do with it. He was doing this out of spite, to clear Sam's name, if he repeated it enough, it would be true.

"I hope you're right."

He stared at the wall, trying not to look, watching out of the corner of his eye as the drive slid across the final few metres, flying around the back of the computer, sliding in, no one any the wiser. It was almost agonisingly easy, too easy, no one even looked twice.

"Are you sure you're alright Theseus?"

He jumped, before collecting himself. "Just tired."

"I'm not convinced." The Warden looked concerned, and Tommy gulped.

"Uh. Had a fight with Void." He mumbled. It wasn't completely a lie, so it rolled off his tongue more easily. "Something stupid." The Warden opened his mouth and Tommy cut in quickly. "It's fine. We're going to go talk it out, it's not that serious."

The Warden sat back, green eyes searching him for a minute with a cryptic expression, as if he could read the truth off his face. Tommy stood dead still, heart pounding, waiting for the other shoe to drop, for the Enforcers to burst in and tell him it was a trap, for every worst-case scenario spiralling in his head to come true.

"Alright." He said finally, almost anticlimactic in the end. "You'd better sort things, I don't have patrol partners to spare for your time slot right now." Tommy gave a quick, sharp nod of his head, the sudden switch back to the Warden as startling as it was expected. "I'll talk to you later, I have a meeting to attend to now."

He couldn't accept the dismissal faster, hurrying towards the door, pushing it open, barely giving Jack a nod as he walked past. Every step echoed in his ears, painfully slow, the voice in his head screaming at him to run, but he forced himself to take it steady.

His heart pounded fast, the cyborg's eyes burning into the back of his neck. He wasn't a coward, he knew he wasn't, but the shaking wasn't helping. He turned the corner, out of sight, but he didn't let himself stop, not yet.

The further away he got the more the adrenaline sunk in. He was elated with his success, against everything a smile was breaking out over his mouth but at the same time an odd empty feeling hung heavy in his chest, like something was missing, like he'd lost something he never had.

OH MY GOD I DIDN'T EVEN REALISE, HAPPY 50 CHAPTERS

I can't believe I tricked y'all into following this shitpost of a fic this long, thank you so much. Anyway, Tommy villain arc pog? Boys been at breaking point for so long, it was a matter of time, after 50 chapters it's what he deserves

Chapter 51

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

There was no sign of Ranboo when his shift finished. He didn't really expect it but it still felt bittersweet, he'd gotten so used to seeking him out at the first opportunity, for a listening ear or someone to mess around with.

Schlatt had left some hours ago, he hadn't seen him go, the only soul left behind was Purpled, stood up on the second floor, watching the floor of the lobby. Tommy followed his gaze to the blue-suited man he'd spoken to before the president's speech, Quackity, who was drifting towards the door, clearly having hung back for some reason, talking to someone.

Purpled's eyes lingered on him with a purposefully blank expression, watching his every move, Quackity completely oblivious to his audience of two. He stepped outside, and Tommy looked up again, intending to get the other boy's attention, but he was already gone

It was odd, but he dismissed it, he had enough on his mind, heading out into the fresh night air. The usual cacophony of cars and music and people and everything in between greeted him, the sound rising out of the city centre on a fresh breeze, carrying it for miles as he walked down the dark streets, duffel bag thrown over his shoulder.

The lines of takeaways were lit up, the air outside heavy with the smell of frying oil and spices, restaurants filled with chattering patrons, life was almost back to normal after weeks of curfew, it was like nothing had changed, and yet everything had, he couldn't remember the Tommy of a few weeks ago, let alone a few months anymore.

It took him a little while to get to the rooftop they'd agreed to meet, almost dragging his feet, afraid of what he'd find. When he made it up ranboo was already there waiting for him, sat on the wall, knees pulled up to his chest, staring out over the skyline.

"Didn't know if you'd show your face." The other boy visibly started, spinning around, opening his mouth to ask a question. He didn't get that far, Tommy cutting him off. "I did it, before you ask."

"Thank you." He said sincerely. A little of the weight fell off his shoulders, and he sat back. "I-. I'm sorry, it was a lot to put on you, I panicked. I shouldn't have done that." Ranboo admitted. "I didn't think it through."

"Bruh." Tommy folded his arms. "If I don't want to do something, I'll fucking tell you. You can't make me." The other boy acknowledged that with a wry smile.

A heavy tension hung in the air between them, both watching the other's every move, the easy comradery they'd gained shattered into dust, replaced by an uneasy wariness, skirting around the metaphorical elephant in the room, waiting for the other to speak.

"So you're the Ghost." Tommy said finally, stuffing his hands in his pockets, trying to act casual.

“That nickname’s so stupid. They think I can phase through walls or something.”

“I know about the Syndicate. I don’t know how much they told you, but I know who they are.”

Ranboo nodded, taking a sip from a water bottle. “That’s why I decided it was safe to tell you, they warned me about that, said you’d seen Haven and all. Said it might lead to you working me out as well.”

Tommy laughed. “Apparently not. Apparently, I’m thick as shit and needed to walk in on all of you doing illegal stuff before I clocked on.”

He spluttered, covering his mouth with a hand before he spat his drink out. “You did as well.”

“I guess Wilbur told you about that.” His good mood died a little. “What kind of shitty luck do I have.” Tommy buried his head in his hands. “The whole city is looking for the Syndicate, and I somehow just fucking walk in on them. Again, and again, and I didn’t even know.”

“Main character energy.”

Shut up,” He said irritably. “What do you think this is, some kind of fucking nerd book?”

“I mean. You never know.”

“Anyway, that’s not what I’m here for.” He sat down, facing Ranboo. “You owe me answers.”

“Fire away.” Ranboo said simply. “I’ll do the best I can.”

“How the hell did you get here? Seems a good place to start.”

“Like from the part where I joined the Agency or the very beginning?” He asked.

“Very beginning, we’ve got time.”

“I wasn’t really meant to be a spy.” He explained. “I grew up moving from meta hideout to hideout trying to escape the Enforcers. I was fourteen when the hideout I was in got raided, so I made a run for it. Ended up running into Techno, he hid me and lied to the Enforcers about where I was, I didn’t know what else to do and he was also a meta so I trusted him. He took me back to Haven and I grew up there for the last 3 years of my life.”

“And then? Why Lethe?”

“I wanted to help, I wouldn’t stop until Techno let me, they didn’t want me in the middle of fights and my powers made sense when they needed to get into places. So when they said they needed someone in the tower I volunteered, said I always wanted to know what being a hero was like, because I’d heard stories from Phil.”

“And they just let you do that?”

“No.” Ranboo shook his head quickly. “No Phil fought me on it every step of the way, he didn’t want me going there, he said it had only got worse since he was there but I wanted to know. Techno didn’t

want me to go either, he said it was too dangerous but I wouldn't give up."

"To know your enemy you have to walk a mile in their shoes, or whatever it is, Techno says it all the time."

"I've never heard him say that," Tommy said quietly. "But go on."

"All I was doing was passing back small bits of information, it wasn't much, no one would ever suspect me, that was the only reason they ended up letting me go. I said I was an adult because I didn't want to be an apprentice and have someone watching me, that would make things harder, but they found out I lied, put me with Niki and the rest is history really."

Tommy sat up suddenly, an icy feeling crawling across his chest. "Oh my god."

"What?"

"You knew Niki was alive." Horror flooded across his face, the betrayal suddenly so much worse, burning hot in his chest. "You really knew she wasn't dead, you lied. You fucking lied, and you acted the shit of it."

"I didn't know." Ranboo held his hands up. "Tommy I swear I didn't know."

"How can I trust you!"

"I didn't." He promised. "I suspected she wasn't, because that wasn't the Syndicate's style, but for my safety, they didn't confirm anything. For all I knew, she was gone, and that was all I could know because it was too dangerous for anything else."

"And you just kept on working for the people who might have killed her?"

"I know it looks bad, but I've known Techno and the others for a very long time, far longer than I've known Niki, I trusted them to make the right decision." He looked down. "I missed her, I really did, I couldn't see her either. Like I said, I didn't know anyone, I was living on my own in that stupid mouldy apartment, Niki was all I had."

"I was there." Tommy said defensively.

"I didn't really know you yet, so it was really lonely, I was genuinely upset she was gone, that wasn't fake, I was suddenly really lonely, I couldn't talk to Techno, I couldn't talk to anyone, it was just me on my own again, like it was before. And even when I did get to know you, it wasn't the same as Niki, I couldn't talk as openly about Schlatt and stuff the Agency had done with you, which was nice, because it didn't always feel like work but at the same time it sucked because I had to be on guard, all the time, it wasn't safe which wasn't your fault, it's just isolating sometimes." He sighed. "I know it sounds stupid for me to say it was hard, it was nothing compared to what you were going through but I'm just trying to say in a really stupid way that I wasn't lying to you about that, I wouldn't do that."

Tommy pressed his hands against the stone, watching the street far below. "You know, they said someone told them she was in danger. Was that you?"

“That was me.” He agreed. “Schlatt heard about her, about the way she was acting out, she would have been dead before the end of the month. I told them to come pick her up, what else could I do, I had to try.”

“You saved her.” He realised. Pieces were slowly falling into place,

“I didn’t know if I did the right thing, I wanted to tell you so badly that she was safe and we had to but...”

“I wouldn’t have understood.” Tommy interrupted.

“Yeah. You were angry and out for blood I guess so it was best not to risk it.”

“Were you really afraid I’d kill you?” His voice wasn’t much above a whisper.

Ranboo tilted his head, mulling it over. “I was just scared in general, it makes you paranoid, makes all the worst things pop up in your head and you can’t do anything but listen to them, constantly.”

“Yeah I’ve noticed that.” Tommy said bitterly. “I’ve been feeling like people are watching me for days now.”

“I mean it’s happened before, Syndicate members have died. Missions have gone wrong, there was a guy called Apollo before me, he and Techno were really good friends, I didn’t know him that well though.” He continued. “So it wasn’t completely crazy, you would have turned me in straight away.”

“Apollo like the dead guy? The one they said you made up for sympathy or something?”

“He was real, it was a cover up. The Warden killed him.” His fists tightened, knuckles turning white as he spoke, crushing the fabric of his sleeve. “Trident right through the chest, the one he carries around all the time. I can’t look at that thing.”

Tommy felt cold shivers run down his spine. He’d held it, he’d been one of the few ever allowed to, the Warden had been in a good mood that day, it had only been for a few moments but he remembered the heavy, cold weight of it. A hand rose to his chest without thinking, pressing against his throat, he could almost feel the sharpened metal was pushing against his skin.

“And what if I told him?” The threat was empty, it always had been, and they both knew it. “I could tell him now, about all of this, are you still scared of that?”

“If he finds out, do you think he’ll wait around? Do you think he’ll drag me off to prison, or will he just finish the job there and then.” Ranboo said bitterly. “Because you know he would, he doesn’t take hostages, he would kill me on the spot, and more importantly he’d probably kill you too.”

“But if he doesn’t, I could just go on with my life, stop feeling like I’m getting followed.” Tommy pointed out. “I’d be a hero, a proper one, not just a job description.”

“You really think he’d stop there? From me it’s not hard to track down Techno, and Wilbur and Phil, and he would kill them too, or drag them off to Pandora because taking Phil’s wings wasn’t enough.” Tommy flinched. “You do know who he was don’t you.”

“I do now. Just funny hearing it from you.”

“I laughed at the comics when you were clearing them out of the house, because you were with Wilbur and all.” Ranboo admitted. “I felt kind of bad afterwards because you didn’t know, but it was a little funny, the irony.”

“And when they held you at knifepoint, I guess that was fake as well.” Tommy realised. “When I tacked Orpheus, genuinely thinking they were going to kill you.”

“Emergency mission. They needed me to get in and plant a device on the Enforcers, it worked, we tracked them to the scene of the fire, it helped us get our hands on the CCTV footage exposing them but I didn’t get back fast enough and then you called and I needed an alibi. I’m sorry.”

He didn’t know what to say to that. Piece by piece, things fell into place, a million clues that seemed so innocent on their own, nothing that anyone would remember at all, until everything fell apart. He began to pace back and forth, the other boy watching him as he did so, playing with his sleeve anxiously, the fabric fraying under his fingers.

“Lethe is a much better name than Void.” He decided after a while. “I’ll give you that.”

“Oh god yeah.” Ranboo agreed immediately. “I hated it, so clunky and unstylish.” He joked

“You’ve never been stylish.”

“Okay, says the boy whose only fashion choice is jeans and a rotation of shirts.”

“Oi! I have some cool jumpers too.” He protested

Ranboo snorted. “That Wilbur and Techno got you.”

Tommy opened his mouth to retort, and then trailed off. “You really knew them all along.”

“I’ve been with them since I was 14, so, yeah.” He looked over apologetically. “I’m sorry for lying about that, I really am, but we didn’t want to risk anything.”

“You had me fooled.” Tommy pulled his coat around himself, not entirely sure if the chill was the wind. “Before you say it, I know, not hard. So, why didn’t you tell them who I was?”

“What do you mean?”

“That I was Theseus?” He explained. “Because Wilbur didn’t know until the hospital attack, and I’d known you for months then, and you knew I knew them, you must have known, you literally met them in the mall.”

He shrugged rooftops. “I don’t know. It wasn’t important, until it was. I honestly thought they put it together, but if they didn’t it didn’t matter, I was more than happy to keep it secret.”

“Why?”

“I’m not here to leak everyone’s identities or something, I’m here to deal with the people in power.” He explained. “You did nothing wrong, you were just my friend, none of the Syndicate’s business, it wasn’t my place.”

That both put a warm feeling into his chest, and froze it at the same time, it made it hurt that little bit more. Ranboo was holding out a metaphorical olive branch, he didn’t need to be here, he didn’t need to try but he was, he was sat there quietly, letting Tommy batter away at him, tear him apart like he deserved it, taking it all with no complaint. Like he always had.

“Was it worth it?” He asked bleakly. “Did something good come out of it?”

“We know they were acting on direct orders from Schlatt.” Ranboo told him. “We have a recording of his voice ordering them to go ahead with the attack on the police stations, he’s responsible for it, we haven’t exactly worked out why, but it’s huge. So yeah, I think so.”

Tommy stared at the road far below. “I don’t have anyone else.” He said quietly. “Even my mum is on the Syndicate’s side, you were all I had left.”

“I’m still here.” He replied, as reassuringly as he could. “I’m not going anywhere, unless you want me gone.”

“And if I do.”

He didn’t reply for a few minutes, turning something over and over in his fingers, a necklace of some kind strung on a black leather thread. “I’ll go.” He told him finally. “It’s not my choice to make here. But is it that bad? Not the keeping secrets or anything, but the Syndicate. Now you know what it is, do you still hate it?”

“No. No it’s not.” Tommy admitted. “Not as bad at least.”

“Then why is it a problem?”

There was no judgement, no expectation, he was just curious or Tommy might not have answered him at all.

“I don’t know. You didn’t have this; you didn’t spend your whole life aiming for this one thing like I did. Being a hero was a game to you, you had a way out if you needed it.”

Ranboo nodded. “I was really lucky.”

He stopped his pacing, staring back out in the direction of District 14. Pandora wasn’t visible from here, too many skyscrapers stood in the way, it was tucked out of sight from most of the city, but he knew it was there, it was a constant presence somehow, like a living thing.

“Everyone has lied to me. And I get it, I really do, it was to save other people, I understand that, I was fucking raised on it in the Agency, always other people first, and even just being a decent human being, ya know.” He leaned against the wall. “And this is something more than that. It goes against everything I grew up with, whether that was right or not.”

Ranboo watched him quietly, head resting on his knees. He looked his age all of a sudden, just seventeen years old, a child, just like him. *You won't get it until you're older, 'cause right now you feel the oldest you've ever been, but you'll see.* And he wasn't much older, but he did see. The world was too big, too many people in every lit up window of the towers around them, too many cars on the street, too many lives winding on past two small insignificant boys trespassing on top of a tower, holding the weight of the world on tired shoulders.

"Techno was right. We're kids, why are we here?" He wasn't angry anymore, just weary.

"Because I didn't let Techno rest until he let me help." Ranboo replied. "And because we don't have a choice, we don't get to choose not to be involved, it's our lives."

"I know why you did it, but it still hurts, it still fucking hurts, you were right to do it but it hurts. I mean how do we go on from here?" He asked bluntly. "What's after this? Am I just going to spend forever being scared I'll accidentally get everyone I love killed, and you doing the same, how is this supposed to end? Is the Syndicate just going to annoy Schlatt forever until he dies and the next corrupt fucker replaces him? I don't get it."

"With time we'll build up enough evidence that we can take him down from the inside out." Ranboo said hopefully. "I mean, there's not many of us, there's only so much we can do but there's more of us now, we're getting better, and I've been doing really well lately." There was a note of pride in his voice. "We're getting somewhere."

"I mean. That's something I can get behind." He admitted. "But after that? What's the point of this then?"

Ranboo hesitated, mulling his answer over, brow furrowed. "Don't you ever wish you knew who your parents were?" He asked. "If you had any siblings?"

Tommy just shrugged. "Not really no."

"You don't want to know at all?" He asked, surprised. "You aren't a little bit curious what your life would have been like if, I don't know, you weren't a meta?"

Tommy wavered. It would be a lie to say he wasn't, he'd been there many times, but he wasn't going to admit that. "No. I have Kristin now, she's my mum." And that wasn't a lie either, he hadn't given a thought to where he came from in years.

"I do." Ranboo admitted. "Maybe I'm just a wishful thinker but I want to know what it would be like. It's getting better, public opinion is largely on our side, but the people in power keep holding us back, I want to change that."

"What makes you think you can?" He challenged.

"I don't know. But it seems stupid not to try, right? Under the Agency I'd be dead by thirty, if I don't I live out the rest of my life underground constantly being scared of getting caught." He pointed out. "I have to try, I've got nothing to lose."

"You're right. What do I have left to lose, except you and Wilbur and Techno, and Kristin and Phil." Tommy said bitterly. "Nothing important, right?"

“And if you stay at the Agency and just let them push you around forever they’ll lose you, everyone knows you don’t retire from that place. And I mean, you’re nothing important, right.” Ranboo looked right back at him, challenging him quietly with a surprising amount of strength. “No one will care if you died, right.”

“No one...”

“Don’t say that.” He cut him off. “Don’t say that Tommy, you know it’s not true.” He was silent. Ranboo leaned a little closer, making direct eye contact. “Hey. You’re my best friend, and you’re more than that, you’re the first person I’ve just been able to do normal things with, as normal as we can, like movie nights, just go around houses and all that kind of thing, that means a lot more to me than you know.”

“Fucking sap.” Tommy muttered, deciding the best course of action to that was just to fall back on old habits and not acknowledge that in any way. “Sounds kinda cringe if you ask me.”

“Tommy.”

“Get dono walled nerd.”

“What does that even mean.”

“It means I’m going to turn you in so I don’t have to listen to your sappy...whatever.” He waved it aside. “I don’t know.”

“You’ll have to tell Aimsey it was your fault I got caught.” Ranboo joked lightly. “They won’t be happy with you.”

“The kid who helps out Niki? What do they have to do with this?”

“I promised I’d come back.” He said quietly. “I promised him I’d make it back safe, and I will.”

“Well if they catch me I’m taking you down with me.” Tommy threatened, all bluster. “Mutually what’s its fuckin’ name.”

“Mutually assured destruction?” Ranboo adopted a concerned expression. “That’s not exactly healthy.”

“It’ll be funny though.” He stated.

“That’s not what I’d call funny.”

Tommy held out his hand. “Cool, do we have a deal or not.”

“No more secrets.” The other boy suggested. “That’s a start, right?”

“No more secrets.” He agreed. He hopped up on the wall, sitting down, dangling his legs over the drop. “That shit sucks.”

They sat in silence for a few minutes, watching car headlights trail away far below, the air growing colder as it got late, the moon rising over the river. “We’ll work this out.” Tommy told him. “I’m not mad. I just don’t know what to do now. Or who to trust or any of that, but I don’t know what else to do.”

“I’ll try and fix this.” Ranboo promised.

“You better.” He checked his watch. “I told Will I’d be back soon. I guess you can come back with me, since you’re not hiding Lethe from me anymore.”

He hesitated. “Is that a good...”

“If I have to deal with this, I’m making the most of it that I can.” He said flatly. “You’re teleporting me, right into the middle of the kitchen because there’s always someone there. You in?”

A slow grin spread across the other boy’s face. “Bet.” He held his hand out

Kristin sat up in shock, staring at them both, head whipping around to Will, a piece of toast half way to his mouth.

“Hey Wilbur.” Tommy said smugly.

“Hi.” Wilbur looked between them carefully, “Uh is that...”

“All sorted.” Ranboo said quickly. “We got the flash drive into the meeting room computer, it should be working.”

Wilbur opened his mouth, shut it, and then set his toast down slowly, looking back and forth between them. “Are... you going to explain that?”

“What’s there to explain?” He asked innocently

“Last I checked....”

“Tommy’s back? I didn’t hear the door go.” Techno walked in, before stopping, taking in the scene in front of him.

“Hi Techno.” Tommy waved at him. “We were just talking about how I helped Lethe put that flash drive into the computer earlier.”

Tommy held his breath, not knowing what was happening. He was laughing, a deep, full laugh, taking in his brother’s horrified expression. He walked over, patting Wilbur on the shoulder. “They grow up so fast, don’t worry about it.”

“I am worried about it.” Wilbur squeaked. “This was not the plan.”

“Fuck the plan.” Kristin chimed in. She winked at Tommy. “I like speechless Wilbur. I could get used to this.”

Tommy grinned, a little more at ease but he wasn't spared, Techno turning to him next. "So how on earth did you work it out."

"Fuck off." He grumbled. "It's not that funny, I'm still pissed off, it's just hard to be mad at Ranboo because he just looks like a kicked puppy. Don't make a big deal of it." His expression flashed with concern, but Tommy looked away and he decided not to press the matter. Ranboo ducked his head, flushing red, and Techno ruffled his hair fondly.

"Jokes aside, it's good to see you kid. We've missed you."

"Missed you too."

They began to talk quietly and Tommy drifted back, throwing his bag down, feeling a little unsteady. He walked over to the fridge, keeping his head down, digging through it for a snack. A hand reached past him, pushing a bowl aside to reveal some leftover pasta labelled with his name, and he glanced up to see Wilbur looking down at him.

"You didn't have to do that." Wilbur said quietly. "Thank you."

"You owe me forever now." He mumbled, pulling it out.

"I can live with that." He passed him a fork. "Are you alright?"

"No." His lip trembled a little, but he bit it back. "What do you think?"

He didn't say anything, he didn't really have to. Tommy's hands began to shake, and he set the bowl down quickly before he dropped it, turning his head away. Arms settled around his shoulders, pulling him back into a hug before he could make an escape. "I'll make it right, I promise." Wilbur said quietly. "I'll fix this."

"Are you going to fix the whole world while you're at it." Tommy said sarcastically. "End every corrupt government, undo every anti-meta law, turn back time to when this all started, huh?"

"I'll try." He promised, and they both knew he meant it.

It was wrong, it was all wrong, he'd betrayed his job, he'd lied to the Captain, to Purpled, to the Warden, to everyone he used to rely on, he was exhausted. And yet, here in the warmth of the kitchen late at night, Ranboo's expression alight, Techno talking with him animatedly, Kristin sat at the table looking better than she had in weeks, Phil leaning on the door, watching on with a look of pride, it felt right.

Everything he knew had been pulled out from under him but he was still here, still standing, life was still moving on. He leaned back into Will, letting him hold him up, just for a little while.

Alliumduo

That is all I have to say really. Sbi family dynamic is one thing, but alliumduo, they're just like brothers *nods*

Chapter 52

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

He didn't remember falling asleep, but he woke up late. Ranboo was sat on the sofa, a blanket wrapped around his shoulders, a little sleepy. He raised his head as Tommy came down the stairs, giving him a nod.

"Good morning."

"Morning Lethe." He winced slightly.

"I don't..."

"Shut up Ranboob." Tommy barely looked at him, heading for the kitchen

"Alright Thomas." He got in calm reply. Tommy scowled.

"Fuck off."

"You started it." He told him, not unkindly. He didn't bother to reply, walking into the kitchen. The radio was playing, Phil was making porridge, Kristin sat watching him with her head resting on her hand, almost not noticing her son's appearance she was so drawn in with whatever conversation they were having. Phil handed him a bowl without a word, motioning towards a bowl of fruit and berries on the table.

"There's some honey on the cupboard if you like that as well."

"Nah I'm good." He sat down on the chair, stabbing his spoon into his porridge with considerable force. "Why is Ranboo here still." He complained, mostly joking. "It's distinctly not poggers. How do we get rid of him."

"I don't know what that means," Phil informed him.

"Old man."

"Child." Tommy glowered at him.

"Don't you start." He picked up his spoon, waving it threateningly in his general direction. "I'll stab you."

Kristin smiled fondly. "That means he likes you Phil." She teased

"I don't!"

Phil just nodded patiently. "That makes sense. Nothing says that like general threats of violence."

“It’s a term of endearment.” Kristin continued. “He’s just a bit in denial.”

“Shut the fuck up.” He turned on her. “You hush.” She just smiled at him warmly, patting his hand.

“Alright dear. Whatever you say.”

He sunk back down, sulking to himself.

“I thought you and Ranboo had worked something out.” Kristin said more quietly.

“Yes.” He admitted. “But I want to be annoyed at him.”

“Do you really have to?”

“Yes.”

She reached over, settling her hand over his, lowering her voice a little more. “I’ve missed you silly.”

“I haven’t been anywhere.” He protested.

“I haven’t seen you around much lately. Not like I used to.” Tommy just shrugged, mouth full of food. He swallowed it, taking a minute to think, still a little sleepy

“Things've been weird I guess.”

She smiled, a little bittersweet. “I was meant to get more time with you and somehow ended up with less.”

“It’s fine. It happens.” He glanced over at Phil. “No ominous cane?”

“It’s better today. So no ominous cane.” He agreed, a slightly fond smile on his face as he looked at the two of them.

“Why are you looking at me like that?” Tommy hissed.

“You have porridge on your nose.” He reached up, scrubbing it aggressively with his sleeve, but nothing came off.

“Fuck you. Liar.” Phil chuckled quietly. “I don’t like you. You’re not forgiven yet.” He added, not even really meaning it, just finding more words to throw but Phil turned serious.

“That’s alright, I don’t expect to be. I’m sorry about that, I really am.” He said solemnly. “Had it all gone to plan you and Kristin would have been out of the country as soon as it was all over and she had everything she needed, and you would have been safe and none the wiser.”

“But it didn’t go to plan.”

“It didn’t.” He agreed. “So we’ve been trying to catch up and fix the mistakes we made.”

“I ‘ppreciate it I guess.” He said tiredly, suddenly not in the mood for an argument with Kristin there, talking back more for the sake of it than wanting to change anything.

“You don’t have to forgive us...”

“Everybody says that.” He burst out, frustrated. “Which is great and all except it doesn’t help, I still don’t know what to do.”

“Just try and make the best of it,” Phil suggested. “Making the best of a bad situation is sometimes the best way to get through with it. Doesn’t mean you have to pretend it isn’t bad, but it makes it easier.”

“I’m trying.” He said tiredly. “I’m really trying. It’s just weird.”

“It’s okay,” Phil reassured him. “This won’t be forever. We’re just keeping you safe until we can find some way of getting you and Kristin out of here.”

Tommy’s head shot up. “I’m not leaving.” He said stubbornly. “Get mum out, but I’m not leaving.”

“She won’t leave without you,” Phil said before she did. Kristin nodded in agreement. “We can’t make you go, of course, but if we find a way it would be for the best. The borders are watched too closely right now though, it’s not worth the risk.”

“Don’t you want us on your side?” He asked curiously. “Why are you trying to ship us out, this isn’t fair.”

“We’re not here to get you on our side, this isn’t a case of with us or against us.” He said seriously. “What we are doing is reckless and dangerous and not something you should be wrapped up in.

“What about Ranboo?” He asked a little pointedly. Phil thought for a moment

“Ranboo is...his own case. He wouldn’t let us rest until we let him help and it’s under very strict rules. He’s not privy to any information that would put him at risk, he’s to get on with his life, and only work for us now and then, and that’s it.”

“And placing a flash drive in the literal meeting room of the Agency isn’t putting him at risk? What the hell was that even about?”

“He didn’t say?” Phil asked, surprised. “It’s a listening device. It’ll record whatever they said, as well as getting some of the files off the PC for us. He’ll go back and retrieve it today and we can see what the president was discussing with the Warden.”

“Why not just have it send them here, like they do in the movies and shit?” He shovelled another spoon of porridge into his mouth. “Wouldn’t that be safer if you don’t want him hurt.”

“Too risky. Signals can be traced. That device can’t be traced back to us if it’s found but a signal could be followed back. It’s worth the risk. Although we weren’t counting on you getting involved.”

“I mean I had a Syndicate name ages ago, I should have seen this coming.” Tommy quipped weakly. Phil laughed at that, moving over to the sink to do the dishes.

“You know when Will told us about you we didn’t quite believe him.” He said wryly. “It was too much of a coincidence.”

“It wasn’t a coincidence, not that much.” Kristin corrected. “He named himself after the nickname.”

“How did you get it? He never told me.” Tommy mumbled something and Phil raised an eyebrow. “Didn’t quite catch that mate.”

“Fell off a ladder.”

He leaned in closer, head tilted, a light sparkling in his eyes. “I’m sorry, you what?”

“I fell off a ladder, okay?” Tommy said a little louder. “At work, and Techno made a joke and I thought it sounded cool. And then he kept calling me it.” Phil started to laugh. There was a palpable release of tension, Tommy throwing his hands up in the air in protest. “It’s not that funny!”

“Mmm. I think it’s quite funny.”

He couldn’t stop the smile from creeping across his face that time. “Okay it’s a little funny.”

“What’s funny?” Wilbur shoved the door open, striding in with his coat half on. “I want to know.”

“Will don’t slam the doo...” It whacked against the wall and Phil sighed. “One of these days.”

“Boys.” Kristin said quietly, sharing a quiet smile with him. Tommy gave Wilbur a once over, shovelling porridge into his mouth.

“Are you going somewhere?” He asked, confused.

“We’re going to Pogtopi-. I mean Haven, are you coming?” He snatched a handful of granola bars out of the cupboard, shoving them into his pockets, stealing the boiled kettle and pouring some into a mug.

“Can’t be asked to sit in a car for half an hour.” He muttered. “It’s too early.”

“No car today, we got boo boy back.” He added cheerfully. “Much safer that way. You in or not, we’re leaving soon.”

“You should go see Niki.” Kristin suggested. “You haven’t spoken to her for a while.”

“I.” He set his spoon down, his appetite dying a little. “I don’t know how.”

“She’s the same as she always was. Just be you. Well, maybe a little less you.” She added teasingly. He rolled his eyes.

“Fine. Gimmie a minute.” He ducked around the corner, yanking his trainers on. Ranboo looked nervous, pacing back and forth in the lounge, pushing his hair out of his eyes over and over. Tommy tried to ignore him at first, waiting for Techno but it was starting to get on his nerves.

“You good?” Tommy asked finally.

“I haven’t seen her for months.” Ranboo said quietly. “I didn’t even know if she was okay, they didn’t tell me.”

“What are you nervous for? It’s Niki?” He blustered. Wilbur gave him a smug look, having overheard the conversation minutes earlier in the kitchen, getting a furious glare in response. “Not a word.” Ranboo glanced back and forth, confused, but he didn’t get time to ask, Techno joining them. He held out his hands, and Tommy grabbed on, Techno taking his other one, Wilbur grabbing his brother’s shoulder. The lounge faded away and they appeared under the cherry tree in the centre of Haven.

It was quite busy for the time of the morning, people bustling back and forth. Ranboo dropped their hands, gazing around, a fond smile spreading across his face. Wilbur nudged him.

“It’s been a while huh?”

“Um. Yeah.” He said after a second, not really registering the question, wandering towards the tunnels, turning around and around to take it all in.

“Ranboo!” There was a blur of red, a figure running across the green, throwing themselves at him. “You came back!”

Ranboo caught Aimsey mid-air, hugging him back tightly. “I promised.” He said quietly. “I promised I would, I’m sorry it’s been so long.”

“I was getting worried.” They muttered.

Wilbur cleared his throat awkwardly. “Where’s Niki?” Aimsey pulled away, pointing down towards the bakery.

“You know, where she always is.” He gave them a thumbs up, speeding up in that direction down the street.

“Oh Niki!” He sang out gleefully. “Niki where are you!”

There was a pause, and then Niki poked her head around the corner, wearing an apron over a light summer dress. Tommy’s stomach dropped, the same wave of emotions slamming into him all over again as she came out onto the makeshift street, making a beeline for Ranboo, dragging him into another tight hug. “Hey!”

“Hi.” He managed “Fancy seeing you here.”

He didn't see anything else, turning away a little, staring at the wall to blink back what definitely weren't tears, because he was absolutely fine.

"Tommy!" He almost didn't hear her calling out his name, a little dazed. She repeated it, holding her hand out, ushering him over. "How have you been?" She said warmly.

"Uh. Yeah. Alright."

Her expression softened a little, seeing him stumble for words. She pulled him into a hug of his own before he had time to protest. "I've missed you."

"Oh."

"I'm sorry I didn't say hi properly when Tubbo arrived, things were a bit rushed." She continued. "But I was wondering when you'd come back."

"I did not miss you." He said stubbornly, and then clung on for a little longer, glaring at Wilbur over her shoulder as if he'd dare say a word about it.

"Come inside, come inside." She ushered the both of them through. "Will let me know you were coming this time so I could put the kettle on. What would you like?" She opened the fridge. "I have some cola?" She held up a red can. "We got some in a few days ago." Tommy's eyes lit up and she smiled. "You don't change."

"Fuck you." He took it, cracking it open, slumping down at the table.

"Ranboo what would you like? Tea? Coffee?"

"Coffee would be nice." He said awkwardly. She busied herself around the stove, taking down two mugs that looked very handmade, a little wonky but good enough, digging around in the cupboards for instant coffee powder.

Footseps trotted down the stairs and Tubbo walked in, wearing pyjamas and a jumper that was much too big for him. He looked tired, but relaxed, and strangely, a lot shorter.

"Wait a minute. You have hooves." Tommy realised. The other boy looked up sharply, realising who was in the kitchen. His smile faltered a little, before recovering.

"Yes. Had to have shoes custom made to hide it, I hate them." He managed

"He had to get used to walking on his hooves again." Niki said cheerfully. "It was like looking after a lamb for a bit, so unsteady on his feet." Tubbo glowered at her without much venom behind it, before dragging a hand over his eyes, looking back at the table. His eyes flickered back and forth between the two of them.

“Bitch.” Tommy set his can down, smacking his palm to his forehead. “I told you Tubbo lashed out at me after the speeches and you went straight to him didn’t you, he said he got out with Lethe the night of the party. I’m so stupid. You knew each other.” Ranboo looked down guiltily. “Was I the only one who didn’t know.” He demanded. “Did you two really keep that from me.”

“We didn’t really plan it, he just turned up demanding to know what I’d done. And then we ran.” Tubbo said. “If that makes you feel better.”

“Did anyone else know about any of it?” He asked. “Is there someone else I should know lied to me?”

“We didn’t tell the Syndicate or anything.” Ranboo admitted. “If you couldn’t tell, it was kind of impulsive. And then we didn’t know what to do so I got you to help, I guessed you’d have some clue, and I wanted you to know.”

“By popping up in a random alleyway as if you were about to stab me. Fucking smart of you big man, good one.” Niki was watching on, not knowing whether or not to speak, a slightly concerned look in her eyes.

“I got out of the meeting with Sam and guessed it was my only chance,” Ranboo told him. “I didn’t mean to scare you.”

“How did you do it so fast?”

“I teleport.” He said, looking pleased with himself. “I just teleport between outfits, and I have my hero suit underneath, no one can even see it because they’re baggy clothes.”

“Huh?”

“Syndicate uniforms are designed to be taken on and off quickly and be worn over other clothes.” He explained. “Makes getting in and out of places easier, and I worked out how to use my abilities to make it even easier.”

“Right.” Tommy stared down at his can. “Makes sense, but also doesn’t.”

“That’s...fair actually.”

“Ranboo I need to show you my new dance studio.” Niki piped up suddenly. “You’ll love it.” He almost knocked his chair over with the speed he leapt to his feet, giving Niki a tense smile.

“That would be nice.” She ushered him over to the stairs, glaring at the other two.

“Don’t kill each other while I’m gone.” Tubbo just nodded, taking a sip from his glass, watching Tommy suspiciously.

“So are you going to explain, since he just ran?” Tommy barely waited until they were out of earshot before turning on the other boy, arms folded.

“I knew who he was, you gathered that.” He replied calmly. “I knew he was Lethe that is, as well as Void, put the pieces together pretty much by accident and told him and we talked a bit. I warned him things might go down with you, and when they did he came to me. He was a bit angry at me at first for hurting you but I explained it was necessary.”

“Was it though?”

“I tried to let you know.” Tubbo said innocently. “I said I kept a lot of secrets for you, I left you little hints around, you’re just really oblivious.”

“Fuck you.” There wasn’t even much strength behind it, he couldn’t even be bothered to fight it anymore. “Why not just tell me?”

“First, you would have probably stabbed him.”

“You didn’t think I’d, you know. Mind being lied to or something.” Tubbo just shrugged.

“I don’t know. I grew up being lied to by a lot of people, I’m kind of used to it. At least we did it for good reasons.” He leant against the counter, stretching lazily. “Does it matter?”

Tommy pondered that for a minute. “I mean we’re alright.” He said awkwardly. “So I guess not.”

A silence fell, distant voices drifting down the stairs, soft music filtering down from the direction Niki had left in. They eyed each other awkwardly, Tubbo trying to keep his head down. The tension in the air could almost be cut with a knife, staring one another down.

“What’s it like down here.” Tommy broke the silence at last. Tubbo smiled at last, a genuine warm smile, a light going on in his eyes.

“It’s nice.”

“Really? Being stuck down here?”

“I’ve been stuck in a mansion on my own for years. This is amazing.” He paused. “I feel like I should say thanks.” He said thoughtfully.

“I didn’t do anything.”

“You didn’t have to help me. If I were you I would have walked away.” He set his glass down, pushing his hair out of his eyes a little to look at Tommy. “You didn’t have to do any of this.” He had no clue how to respond to that. Tubbo waited for a few beats, before realising he had nothing to say. “Alright. Want to go steal shit from Niki?”

“Wait what?”

“Food.” He said cheerfully. “I know where she leaves them to cool.”

He hesitated. “But what if.”

“She won’t mind. Let’s go.” He pushed up the oversized sleeves, heading out of the kitchen with a determined stride. Tommy followed out of curiosity as he walked out of the bakery and around the corner to a little sheltered nook, out of the way of the main drain area.

Trays of baked goods were laid out on a small stone ledge, steam rising off them. Tubbo reached up, snatching some apple turnovers, passing them over. Tommy grabbed them, tossing them from hand to hand, starting to grin, a matching mischievous look appearing in the goat hybrid’s eyes. He stuffed a few more into his pockets, giggling to himself, and then took off at a run for the bench under the cherry tree, Tommy right behind him.

Tubbo whipped one out of his pocket, juggling it in his hands before sinking his teeth into it, not caring if he got crumbs everywhere, kicking his hooves back and forth. “Weird isn’t it.” He said through a mouthful of sweet bread.

“What?”

“We kicked stones at Enforcer’s heads.” He continued cheerfully. “And now we’re sat in a secret community run by the Syndicate. Life’s funny like that.”

“Yeah. Doing a bit more than kicking stones now.”

A shadow crossed Tubbo’s eyes, the guard coming down again for a second. The walls were still very much there, the same wariness, but he was trying. For once in his life, Tommy swallowed any further comment, looking in the other direction, trying not to kill what little of the mood there was left.

“These are good.” He said after a while. Tubbo perked up again almost immediately.

“I helped make them.”

“Oh.” He eyed it suspiciously. “I take that back.” That earned him a muffled snort, and then quiet again.

“I wonder how my bees are doing.” Tubbo mused, out of nowhere. “No one to look after them now.”

“Bees survive in the wild all the time without help.” Tommy pointed out. “They’ll be fine.”

“Yes but that’s different.” He insisted. “Also you might want to hide the food.”

“Why?” Tubbo waved his hand to point out Niki walking towards them, though he didn’t look concerned in the slightest. Tommy swallowed guiltily, brushing the crumbs off his trousers as she joined them, one eyebrow raised.

“So Tommy, I heard you got your own back at the Warden.”

“I-. Wait what?” He stumbled, caught completely off guard, more than ready to defend himself, and blame Tubbo if necessary.

“Ranboo filled me in. And stop taking them.” She aimed that at the goat hybrid. “I know how many there are, you only need to ask.”

“It’s more fun to steal them,” Tubbo said cheerfully, powdered sugar brushed across his upper lip in blatant evidence of his crime.

“You snitched on me.” Tommy turned on Ranboo accusingly while she was distracted.

“It was kind of cool.” He defended himself quickly. “And we were just filling each other in on what happened since we last saw each other, it seemed important.”

“I’m proud of you.” Niki joined. “You’re taking a stand. You didn’t have to help and you did, you’re becoming all the things you always wanted to be.”

“Not quite how I thought.”

“It could be worse,” Ranboo added diplomatically. “I mean, I don’t know, there’s plenty of worse places to be.”

“Yeah.” Tommy nodded slowly, almost surprising himself. “Yeah you’re not wrong.”

He spotted Techno at the other side of the green, waving at him, Techno raising a hand in response, wandering off a bit. Niki and Tubbo talking about some recipe thing, the other boy emphatically pointing out something about the pastry he was eating. It was odd, but it wasn’t terrible, and he was trying to make the best of it all. Niki was alive and well, Wilbur’s laughter ringing out in the distance at some joke no one else knew, Tubbo munching on a pastry like there was nothing better in the world.

He couldn't quite put his finger on it, but it felt normal, oddly mundane in the strangest of places, the fear and the unknown of it all starting to fade, replaced by the beginnings of an odd feeling that maybe it wasn't all so bad, that maybe, this time, he could make this work.

Chapter End Notes

We're back boys. A nice simple chapter to ease me back in, but the plot is coming soon I swear, it's been too long. Sorry for the long writing break, needed a rest but I'm hoping to get back to normal upload schedule again, or something close to it

Also you didn't hear it from me but keep an eye on my Twitter or the Discord if you're in it for some very cool projects and maybe even some collabs coming soon

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Warden's Word

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

He sat on the bench for a little while, watching everyone pass by. Techno was sat under the cherry tree a few metres away, an open book in his lap, paying him no mind. Tubbo joined him on the bench, the three of them sat all doing their own thing, not speaking to each other.

“You know, Schlatt came to talk to us about you being kidnapped.” Tommy said finally. Tubbo started, before glaring at him.

“You have shit small talk.”

“I don’t know.” He protested. “I thought you might be interested.”

“Fine, I’ll bite.” The goat hybrid sat back, folding his arms. “What did he say?”

“Mostly good things? About I mean he said if you’d been kidnapped and they were threatening you he’d give up his position?” Tommy said carefully. “That’s good right?”

Tubbo scowled deeply. “And that’s called a lie.” He said sourly. “You really think he’d let go of a presidency for me? He’s a manipulative bastard and he knows what he’s doing.”

“Oh. That’s a bit shit.”

“You don’t say.” He turned away again, indifferent

“Why did he even have a kid if he didn’t want it.” Tommy said, mostly to himself. “It makes no sense.”

“Publicity stunt a few years back, to soften his image in the eyes of the media.” Tubbo explained. “I wasn’t showing any hybrid features then, other than the hooves, but they were hidden by these prosthetic things I had.”

“I’m adopted, you’re adopted, Spark’s adopted, everyone’s adopted.” Tommy joked. “There’s really a theme going on.”

“My god.” Techno remarked dryly behind them, not looking up. “In a country where hybrids are discriminated against and metas were only made legal under tight restrictions more recently, where meta children are separated from their parents, willingly or otherwise, or their parents were one of the two previously mentioned categories and are now dead, there are a lot of adopted children with abilities. Who could have seen that coming?”

“Shut up nerd.” Tommy tossed back. “No one asked.”

Ranboo wandered over, talking to Tubbo quietly, their voices too low for him to hear what they were saying. He occupied himself instead with an acorn he found in his pocket, the one Snifferish had grown for him, rolling it around in his palm, watching it tumble across the callouses on his fingers.

“Tommy?”

“Huh?” He looked up, pocketing the acorn carefully so he didn’t lose it.

“We gotta go to work.”

Tommy checked his watch, confused. “It’s pretty early still.”

“Yeah I want to get there early so there’s no one in the meetings room.” He explained. “So we can retrieve the flash drive.”

Tommy froze, eyes wide. “What if we get caught?”

“We won’t get caught.” Ranboo reassured him. “It’ll be in and out, and it’s just me. You don’t have to have anything to do with this.”

“I’m not letting you go in alone.” He said stubbornly.

“I appreciate the sentiment but you’ve got nothing to worry about.”

“Well, fuck you.” Ranboo just held out his hand, and Tommy hauled himself up, complaining all the way.

“You can leave me my jacket while you’re at it.” Techno called over. The younger boy ignored him, just barely starting to roll his eyes when they disappeared, reappearing in his room to grab his bag, before teleporting again, Ranboo dropping him off outside the changing rooms

He pulled his gear on quickly, patting Shroud on the head, setting the plushie down on top of his things, slamming his locker shut. Void was already waiting for him, pacing back and forth on the lobby floor nervously.

“Still a chance for you to back out.” He said when he saw him.

“I thought you said there was no chance of us getting caught.” Tommy shot back.

“I’m not worried about us getting caught, I just don’t know if you’ll be happy with any more Syndicate work on your conscience.”

“I’m not doing this for the Syndicate.” He hissed back. “So get that out of your head right now. I’m doing this so you don’t get yourself killed.”

“Aww Tommy.” Ranboo murmured. “I appreciate it, I really do.”

“Bitch I’ll end you before they even find you.” He threatened, all hot air and bluster, rounding on him as they reached the top of the stairs.

“I’ll keep that in mind. Keep an eye out for me.” He vanished, and a pit opened in Tommy’s stomach, hands wrapped around the railings. The silence was suddenly deafening, the metal icy against his hands, heart pounding in his chest.

Ranboo reappeared mere moments later, making Tommy start guiltily. “It’s just me.” He said quickly

“Fuck you.” He muttered. “Did you...”

Void opened his palm to reveal the small silver device, before curling his fingers back over it, tucking it away in his pocket. “We’re good.”

“Are you sure no one saw you?”

“I’m sure.” He replied confidently. “No cameras, no one near, nothing at all. See? Easy.”

“If they found it and left to see who came?”

“Tommy it’s fine.” Ranboo insisted. “I have done this kind of thing so many times, the only way we’ll get caught is if we look guilty. I’ll go drop it off after work and there’ll be nothing on us at all.”

“Hey!” They both jumped slightly this time, only to see Spark trotting over, waving to them. “Oh thank god you’re here.” He whispered. “I was worried I’d have to wait until my shift on my own.”

He looked stressed, glancing over his shoulder, Tommy following his gaze to try and work out what was wrong. Spark caught his eye and shook his head quietly, motioning for them to move to the shelter of the balcony area, looking over the lobby. Purpled was waiting there, sat down, back against the pillars.

“What’s going on?” Ranboo asked curiously

“It’s the Warden, he’s in a bad mood.” Spark informed them. “Might just want to keep out of the way right now.”

“And that’s news because?” Tommy said sarcastically. “He’s always in a bad mood these days.”

“He had a fight with the Captain.”

Tommy blinked. "He what now?"

"We don't know what happened, Purpled saw it though." He jabbed his thumb at the other trainee. "He was supposed to have a meeting with him."

Purpled wasn't paying much attention, his thumbs hooked into his belt, staring into the distance. Eryn snapped his fingers to get his attention and he tilted his head back lazily. "What?"

"Tell Tommy. About what you saw."

Purpled just shrugged. "What is there to say. Warden was screaming at the Captain about going through records to track something down, the Captain was saying she was sure we didn't have that, he wasn't listening, she was nearly in tears. I decided that was a very good sign for me to get the hell out."

"What was the meeting about?" Tommy prompted him. "What happened?"

"Oh." He scuffed his foot against the floor awkwardly. "Cos I'm, you know, graduating soon."

"Oh that's cool." Void piped up. "Right?"

Purpled just shrugged. "Sure, I'm going to love being fully responsible for all my actions, far more legally liable and no longer being protected from the brunt of fights that we're not equipped to deal with. And not getting paid much more for it. Happy eighteenth to me I guess."

"Jack." Spark hissed. Purpled's eyes flickered up, seeing the cyborg down right below them, close enough to potentially be within earshot.

"I mean if he hasn't heard me talk shit about this job by now then he's a shit computer."

"He's a person." Void insisted. "Not a computer."

Purpled fixed him with a look. "Fine, half a computer. And somehow he's still thick as bricks."

"Like you can talk." Eryn tossed over his shoulder.

"Just got sent our route." Ranboo said quietly, ignoring their bickering, tilting his screen to show Tommy. "We're heading from 4th district to 7th along the river."

"I'm on 11, 12 and 13th." Spark said glumly, checking his.

"1st to 3rd." Purpled added. "They always give Punz and me the fancy districts."

"You don't do anything too crazy to make the rich folk uncomfortable." Eryn quipped. "No magicking up fireballs, just super senses and good aim, they can manage that."

"Are we heading out?" Void asked.

"It's a bit early. We still don't have to go for another twenty minutes or something."

"I know, but I don't want to hang around if things are that bad." Tommy heard the unspoken this time, waving goodbye to the other two, following him out. They headed across the city, past the shopping district, Tommy barely paying any attention. If there was crime going on he saw nothing, head running at a hundred miles an hour. St Mary's was still surrounded by scaffolding but the rubble was long gone, the area closed off by construction fences. He wavered by an alleyway nearby, looking over his shoulder at the hospital.

"Theseus?" Ranboo turned back, seeing he wasn't following along, a little concerned. "Are you there?"

"How many people died? Did they ever know?"

"I don't know." He admitted. "No one knows, we're pretty sure they're keeping the actual number from us. But it was a few."

"Be honest." Tommy turned to face him. "I know you know."

"Eighteen." He said finally. "The final count was eighteen people, plus two that were caught in crossfire from the Enforcers, like Kristin, but they weren't as lucky, nor were they included in any reports."

"How do you accidentally shoot three people and not hit the one person you're aiming for, because he's fucking bullet proof?" Tommy spat.

"What if it wasn't an accident."

Tommy thought about that for a few moments. "Fuck this job." He muttered. "Fuck all of this, if we ever find out who did that I'm going after them myself."

"I would say that's a bad idea..."

"But?" He pressed

"But I'd probably do the same." He paused, before turning away a little to go. "Let's move on." He suggested. "I don't want to look at this either."

They moved on, Tommy kicking stones as they walked down the riverside path, watching as they hit the surface, sending out little ripples across the water. Ranboo was glancing over every now and then, watching him for some kind of reaction

"Why are you looking at me like that?"

"I don't know. We were getting close to where..." Tommy stopped, looking up ahead to a familiar bend, the memory months old and barely there, overlaid with a mask he wasn't afraid of anymore. It was still an odd hollowness, but since Haven, since speaking to her again he'd barely thought about it. He never even questioned the gap in his memory anymore, he didn't even care.

A tattered piece police tape hung off one of the bushes, the only thing left to say anything had happened there. He walked up, pulling it away from the thorns it had been caught on, wrapping it around his hand thoughtfully, wandering towards the water's edge.

"What's on your mind?" Ranboo prompted

"Not that. I'm fine with that. Android." He said shortly.

"Android?" He asked, confused. "Why him?"

"Cos of Purpled earlier. Did he ever, you know, overhear Niki saying anything like that."

Ranboo nodded quietly. "Definitely. She never believed he would do anything like that."

"You said she was in danger. When she, you know, left."

"Died." Ranboo corrected. "Just get in the habit of saying died in case we're around people. But yes, we think it might have been Jack." Tommy's heart sunk.

"I argued with him sometimes. But I didn't think he was evil." He said quietly

"I don't know if he's evil." Ranboo said carefully. "I don't know, he doesn't seem like someone who would be malicious for the sake of it."

"Then why?"

"Just doesn't have a choice. Same as the rest of us."

"You have a choice." Tommy said sourly. "You chose to be here, not like the rest of us. And you can leave if you want, just go back to Haven and hide."

Ranboo's eyes clouded slightly. "I mean yes. Kind of, if I hadn't they'd have found me pretty quickly, I stick out."

"I guess." His phone began to buzz in his pocket. He pulled it out, moving away a little to get out of the wind, cupping his hand over the speaker. "Hey mum."

"Hey, when do you get off work?" There was an odd note in Kristin's voice that he couldn't quite decipher. He checked his watch quickly, glancing up at Ranboo to let him know something was up.

"Pretty soon, actually. Why?"

"Phil asks if you can tell Ranboo that the both of you should stop by later. He has something for you."

"Okay? What is it?" He asked, a little confused

"You'll see."

“That was weird.” He stared at the phone. “Is she alright?”

“Who was it?” Ranboo asked curiously.

“Kristin.” Tommy answered. “But she was being really vague, and I don’t know why, I’m worried.”

“What did she say?” Void moved closer, concerned.

“Said Phil wanted to see us later or something. That he had something for us.” The other boy blinked.

“What were her exact words?”

“Phil asks if the both of you can stop by later.” He repeated. “Why?” Understanding dawned on the other meta’s face, and he relaxed

“Stop by is code for haven, if they say anything else they just mean the house.” He explained. “Just in case anybody else is listening.”

“Why didn’t they just ring you then.” He stuffed his phone away, his relief turning into annoyance.

“How was I supposed to know that?”

“I leave my phone behind. They probably tried and failed but you never leave it so they called you.”

"That's very logical I hate it."

"You would." Ranboo agreed amicably.

"Fuck you!"

Once their patrol was over they couldn't leave fast enough, heading out of the lobby as Blaze and Spark were only just getting in. Ranboo made a beeline for a small alleyway they could teleport from without being seen, stepping out into the small office Wilbur and Techno had shown Tommy days ago, deep into the sewer system away from Haven, the base of the Syndicate itself. Some of the screens had been pushed to the end of the room to form a larger display, a few figures huddled around it

Snifferish hung to the back of the room, shawl pulled around her shoulders, looking troubled. Techno was leaning against the wall, Will hovering closer to the monitors. Phil was standing near the screens, Kristin at his shoulder, both looking serious. The air of the room was tense, no one was speaking.

“Hey.” Niki appeared out of the shadows behind them, giving them a tense smile. “How was work.”

Tommy blinked. “Wait why are you here?”

“Yeah, I thought you said you weren’t getting involved.” Ranboo said, just as surprised

“I said I wasn’t helping, I wouldn’t use my powers to help them, I wouldn’t tell them anything about the Agency but...”

“But I said it was important.” Wilbur finished for her. “I asked her to hear what we had to say, just this once.”

“You found something, didn’t you,” Ranboo asked quietly.

“A bit more than something.” Kristin said softly. “Tommy you might want to sit down.”

“That bad huh.” He blustered. “What is it?”

“We got the recording back. Some of it is muffled. But the rest of it, well, you’ll see.” Wilbur leaned over towards the keyboard. “So everything before this is normal, just politics and chatting and everything you’d expect from a meeting, we thought it was another dead end.” He explained. “And then this happens, he sends everyone else out, until it’s just him and the Warden. Listen to this.” He hit the play button.

“I said, I’ve done my part.” The Warden’s voice, cold and clear as always. “I want nothing more to do with this.”

“And I said, we had a deal.” The president's familiar drawl replied.

“Our deal was supposed to end once I did as you asked, which I did.”

“This ends when I decide it ends. Or do you want the whole country to know what you did?”

“If you expose me, you go down too.” The Warden said icily. “You need me.”

“He’s trying to pin something on the Warden?” Tommy paled. “That’s bad, that’s really bad.”

“Keep listening,” Wilbur said quietly.

“I gave you what you wanted, I bought you the damn time you needed, I stood by.” The Warden said stiffly. “I want what was promised, let’s not beat around the bush now.”

“Ah ah. Not so fast.” There was the sound of some kind of paper hitting the table. “One last thing.”

“There’s always one more thing with you.” The paper rustled as if it had been picked up again. Schlatt paid him no mind, carrying on as if he hadn’t even spoken.

“You have an overview there, mostly things we discussed over the phone, but the details are strictly secret, you’ll have to pick everything up from holding box 17 at Manberg National bank. You know who to ask for.”

“You could just give it to me, since you’re here.” The Warden said, the barest hint of annoyance in his tone now, carefully reined in.

“I would like the knowledge of the existence of those documents to remain on a need-to-know basis, and with the amount of paparazzi watching us walk in, I don’t think that would be possible.” He stated, “They’ll be watching our every move, a briefcase coming in and not leaving would draw attention. I did not get this far by drawing attention.”

“And then what. Yet another thing?”

“Let me level with you, we both have skin in the game,” Schlatt said stiffly. “Reports, recorded calls, classified emails, all of the evidence of what happened that night, he took it all and if we don’t get them back we’re both done for.”

“And then what? How do I know you’ll keep your promises?”

“Once he’s dealt with and I have those back in my hands I can destroy all evidence of our transactions and we can move on as if this never happened.” A slight strain entered the president’s tone, the barely concealed animosity on both sides surfacing. “I will sign into law everything that you have asked for in return for your aid and your silence.” He said bluntly. “I don’t think I can be more clear or fair than that.”

“And you’re not afraid I’ll tell?”

“About what, exactly.” A hint of amusement came into Schlatt’s tone. “Whatever you choose to spill, I can keep my name out of it all.”

“Can you? Your men were already pictured at the scene.” The Warden asserted. “Protest groups have already tracked down their unit numbers and confirmed them as real, you’ve gotten sloppy.”

“Renegades, rebels for a failing cause.” He said dismissively.

“Your citizens aren’t that stupid.”

“Why would their own president attack a hospital.” Schlatt’s glee dripped from every word he spoke. “You sound mad. Not to mention talk like that sounds like treason against the state.” It was the tone of a man who knew he held all the cards in his hand, the arrogance seeping off him even through an audio recording. It made all the hairs on Tommy’s neck stand on end, fingers wrapped around the arms of the chair he sat on, knuckles white.

“And why would I have anything to do with it. You said it yourself, meta support is the highest it’s ever been, people trust the Agency, people trust me. As hard as you’ve tried, times are changing, you won’t find it as easy to take me down as you think.”

“And would they still trust you if they knew, if I told them what you did?” He asked mockingly

“You can’t afford to.” The Warden replied with full confidence. “If you had other options you wouldn’t be here, so I suggest we stay civil.”

“As you wish.” There was a pause, and then a chair slid across the floor. “Always a pleasure doing business.”

“I wish I could say the same.”

Footsteps headed away. Wilbur leaned forward and stopped the recording, leaving a hollow in its wake

Chapter End Notes

This bit of the fic is the hardest for me to write so far, simply because I never expected to get this far, this fast, I didn't plan ahead, so I'm sorry for the slightly slower updates but we're powering through. Hope you enjoyed!

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Chapter 54

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

There was a kind of stunned silence in the room that hung there for quite some time. Tommy just stared at the monitors.

“I don’t understand.”

“Someone got away with proof.” Ranboo said quietly. “Enough to make Schlatt of all people nervous.”

“We need to get our hands on that before he does.” Wilbur stood up. “Whoever ‘he’ is we need to find him. Now.”

“I feel like we’re jumping the gun here.” His brother leaned forward, holding out a cautionary hand. “We don’t even know where to start, we don’t know who, or what we’re looking for.”

“He does though, and he’s already got a head start on us, we can’t waste any time. What if...”

“What’s going on?” Tommy interrupted. “What was Schlatt talking about? What proof?”

“Oh Tommy.” Niki said kindly.

“Don’t oh Tommy me.” He retorted before she could finish. “Everyone seems to know what’s going on here except me.”

“There’s only one event they could be referring to that the Warden knew about, where Schlatt’s men were filmed at the scene.”

“The hospital?” He said, confused. “I mean I know that, I get it, it’s pretty serious that he wants to blame it on the Warden but what’s that got to do with it all?”

“He isn’t trying to pin the blame on him.” She explained. “He’s threatening to expose him for something he’s already done, that he was already involved with.”

He frowned. “You’re not saying...”

“He knew about the attack.”

“Well yeah, we were all there.” He said, confused.

“Didn’t you hear him? Schlatt admitted to it, in a joking form but he did, he carried the attack on the hospital.” Wilbur stood up. “He was responsible for the deaths of all those people, and the Warden knew, he knew. And someone out there has the proof of it.” A weight sunk in Tommy’s chest, crushing his lungs.

“I. It’s not like anyone would believe us, he said that too.” He pointed out. “Are we getting mad at him for not saying anything? You know what would happen to him if he tried to come forward, people would laugh in his face.”

“You don’t understand. He knew it was going to happen, he knew Schlatt was responsible for it and he said nothing.” Niki pressed. “You heard him, ‘I stood aside’. ‘if they knew what you’d done’. That’s more than just finding out afterwards, he knew.”

“Ranboo?” Tommy said, almost laughing at the ridiculousness of it all, looking for backup. “You’re with me right, this is stupid.”

The other boy wasn’t making eye contact, staring at his hands. “He wouldn’t let me teleport the bomb out, said something about waiting for a bomb squad.” He said quietly. “And that if we did something wrong, it would reflect badly on the Agency, he didn’t even consider a bomb going off would look bad, he knew. He lied to me.”

Techno reached out, placing a firm hand on Ranboo’s shoulder. “Not your fault kid.”

“There could be a perfectly reasonable explanation for all of this.” Tommy was floundering, searching around for a bit of understanding, for a shred of an agreement but there was nothing. Wilbur’s expression was something akin to pity even. “No. No that’s not right.” He shook his head stubbornly. “That doesn’t make any sense.”

“His behaviour has been strange lately, hasn’t it.” Wilbur rose to his feet, walking closer. “He’s been getting invites he shouldn’t have, private audiences with the president, do you know how many people would kill for one of those, and I mean that in the most literal sense.”

“You don’t know that? Maybe the government is just switching tactics, they know it’s getting too late to keep up the anti-meta stuff?” Tommy tried. “Why would he do that, it makes no sense.”

“I don’t know, maybe because he’s a piece of shit.” Will threw his hands up in the air in frustration. “How much more obvious does he have to be until you see that he’s not who you thought he was, that you can’t trust a single word that comes out of his mouth!”

“Orpheus.” Phil’s voice hardened a little. He stood up a little straighter, staring his son down and there it was again just for a few moments, that split second reminder that the head of the Syndicate was there too, a dangerously quick mind behind the veneer of a tired father. Will jutted his jaw stubbornly, standing his ground, but Thanatos didn’t budge. Tommy could almost see his missing wings spread out behind him, a shadow falling across his face.

Will looked away finally with a muttered comment of some kind and Phil backed down, turning back to the room, paying to mind to the sudden tension. “Schlatt made some pretty major promises.” He said to Tommy. “Things the Warden would want. Do you have any idea what kind of lengths he might go to just to get that?” It was a genuine question, without any kind of judgement or bias to it, waiting for his response.

Tommy looked around for a second, expecting him to be addressing someone else. “You’re asking me?”

“Unless there’s another Tommy here, yes, I’m asking you.” He teased a little.

“Thought this was a Syndicate meeting.” He muttered. “And you’ve all already made your mind up.”

“Niki and you are here because you know the Warden best out of all of us.” Phil said simply. “If you don’t want to be here, for whatever reason then you don’t have to stay, don’t feel you have to be involved but I needed you to hear this.”

“Especially after you put yourself at risk to get it.” Niki added, Kristin humming in agreement.

“You really want to hear what I have to say?” He was taken fully aback.

“Yes.” Phil replied simply. “Why wouldn’t I?”

“I-.”

“He’s used to Agency meetings.” Niki answered for him. “Apprentices are supposed to just shut up and watch and learn.”

“Well fuck that.” Techno muttered

“I believe you may not have all the information we do, so you have a different perspective.” Phil said calmly. “So I’d like to hear yours, and then we can work things out from there. We’re not here to fight you, or drag you onto our side, though a few people have... opinions.” He gave Wilbur a look. Before he could say any more there was a sudden choked sound, and Tommy turned to see Ranboo leaning against Techno, eyes red rimmed. His hand was pressed over his mouth, trying his best to stay quiet and not draw attention, turning his head away when everyone looked, Techno standing in front of him protectively.

“You alright mate?” Phil asked kindly.

“I should have done it. I shouldn’t have listened to him, I should have known.” Ranboo whispered. “I could have helped. I should have just got the bomb out of there.”

“No.” Came the immediate firm reply. “You couldn’t have done anything, you couldn’t have saved anyone, this was way beyond us.” He leaned on his cane, studying the screen with a grim expression. “I don’t even know what to do about this.”

“It’s the evidence we wanted.” Techno sounded grim. “Wish it didn’t feel so bittersweet getting it.”

“He’s been getting worse and worse since the attack.” Ranboo said tiredly. “It lines up.”

“Of course he is, doesn’t mean he did it, it was pretty fucking traumatic, no wonder it’s affected him” Tommy replied. “We should know, we were there.”

“So were we.” Wilbur reminded him.

“I forget.” He admitted. “You don’t... You don’t seem like Orpheus at all. Orpheus is all cold, you’re acting as if this is personal right now.”

“It is personal!” Will burst out, as if the words had been stuck in his chest, waiting to break free. “If it wasn’t for the Warden I wouldn’t have lost my brother!”

“What?”

“The Warden was helping the Enforcers guarding the convoy I found them in.” Phil explained in a decidedly more diplomatic fashion, trying to calm Wilbur. “He used to work with them a lot back in the day.” There was an insinuation on the last part, an undertone Tommy couldn’t ignore, that the Warden had done it before and could do it again.

“Why didn’t you just tell me that?”

“Because you adore him.” Wilbur said before the elder could get a word in. “Because you’ll sing his praises, and apologise for his every actions even when the evidence is in front of you.” It wasn’t said maliciously, more with a desperate edge, like he was pleading for Tommy to listen to him without saying it out loud, but the younger boy refused to hear it.

“He was one of the only people that was there for me! Don’t act like he’s a monster!”

“I’m sorry to say this but he took away your every support system, school, peers, a social life of your own, and replaced it with what he wanted.” Phil said grimly. “So yes, maybe he was one of the only people there for you.”

“He didn’t take that away. I did that, I slipped up and revealed my powers, that’s not his fault.”

“It’s the law’s fault, actually.” Kristin intervened. “Something which, you have to admit, he has done more to uphold than he’s ever done to fight it, despite what he says.”

“Says the former Police Commissioner.” He snapped without thinking

She sighed. “That was low.”

He backtracked immediately. "I'm sorry, I didn't mean it." He stared at his hands. "I-. I need to go." He turned on his heels, ducking towards the hatch. It was propped open, and he clambered down, running into the tunnels blindly, away from it all. Voices sounded in alarm behind him, but he didn't look back, feet skidding across cold stone. The air was frigid and stale but he didn't care.

"Wait!" Niki's voice rung out behind him. "Tommy wait!"

He slowed a little, not looking back at her. "They're wrong." He spat it out like a challenge

"The Warden...."

"He wouldn't." He insisted. "Sam wouldn't do that. You know that, right? I mean he might not have been the best boss but that doesn't make him evil right?"

"They've been thinking it might have been a false flag attack for a while." She replied quietly. "The Enforcers were too prepared, too much happened too quickly, the attacks were too specific, they knew this was coming. They just didn't know who else was involved."

"Why would Schlatt attack a hospital. Why would the *Warden* attack a hospital, can't you hear how ridiculous this is?"

"I know it was..."

"How would you know anything, you weren't there!" The words were out of his mouth before he even thought them through. Anything she was about to say fell away, a devastated expression crossing her face. She pulled him into a tight hug.

"I'm sorry. I'm so sorry. You shouldn't have had to go through that."

"No, I didn't mean it." He said quickly. "It's fine."

"You're just a kid, you should have been safe, they should have been able to keep you safe, and they didn't." She said gently. "And in the end there was nothing you or I could have done about that. It was his responsibility to keep us all safe, and he failed."

"I trust him." He had tears in his eyes, fighting a losing battle. "He wouldn't."

"He's not a good man Tommy." She said gently. "He never has been, you know that. You idolised him so I tried my best not to say too much but you and I both know he didn't have to treat us the way he did." She let him go, stepping back to look at him. "It wasn't normal, it wasn't right even when I was there and from what I've heard it's only got worse."

"That's not the same. That's bad decision making, not terrorism, not a whole conspiracy theory."

"He has blood on his hands, not least that of our little brother, and Apollo." Techno added. He'd caught up to them without either of them realising, leaning against the wall. "Stabbed him in the back

while we were running away. We heard the call across their radios not to use lethal force, he lost his temper, and he chose to do it anyway. That was on him.”

“Who was Apollo, I don’t understand, I don’t know him, I didn’t even know he was real until recently,” Tommy said, frustrated

“Just a member of Haven who wanted to help, ever since then it’s just been us, we couldn’t risk anyone else. One of the reasons we were so reluctant to let Ranboo join.” Techno explained. “After we lost him we didn’t want to risk it.”

“And what about me? Was it fine to get me dragged into all of this? Am I just expendable?”

“No, never,” Niki said, far more fiercely than he was expecting. Techno paused a little, though.

“Not to me.” He said finally. “And heroes don’t die, remember.” The last part was a little mocking, though not aimed at him, just at the general air. “What is there to worry about.”

“Except they do.” Tommy said sourly. “Well, not Niki and Phil. But the others, they’re all gone.”

“Except they do.” Techno agreed. “All the time, in every myth and every legend. What is it they like to say, heroes don’t die, they go missing in action.” He spoke the words as if they soured on his tongue. “What a pretty way to say murder. What a way to glorify pointless deaths.”

“It’s happened over and over, and over again.” Niki knelt down in front of him. “It would have been me. It was nearly you. Ranboo told me what happened at the gun deal bust, you were shot, you could have died.”

“Perks of the job?” He managed, a little bit of a light-hearted tone forced in

“How many is enough? When is the price of freedom not worth it anymore?” She said, not unkindly. “He is playing games with lives and we’re paying the price, whether or not we’re right about the hospital.”

“Puffy wouldn’t let that happen.” He said stubbornly. “There’s no way.”

“No,” Niki said firmly. “She wouldn’t, she must not have known.”

“I mean we don’t know that for sure yet,” Techno said carefully.

“We do know that.” She barely let him finish. “Puffy would never, you don’t know her like I do.”

“And what? You’re the heroes in this situation? You want to talk about terrorism all of a sudden.” Tommy directed that at Techno. “You want to point fingers and blame?”

“I wouldn’t call myself a terrorist, and I don’t think you would either, you know us better than that. I dare say in a few months you know us better than you know the Warden, a man you’ve known for years.” Techno said flatly. “If we haven’t proved that by now I don’t know how we will.”

“How do I know who to trust anymore?”

“No one’s innocent here. In the end we like to say we’re the lesser of two evils, which is easy to say, but also it’s made much easier than you’d think because we don’t have innocent blood on our hands, and we haven’t manipulated or dragged children into our fights.” He said it all in the same dry monotone that almost dragged a smile from Tommy, despite it all, so at odds with the seriousness of the situation. “The bar is very low, you see. We’re just here to clean up their messes.”

He stared at the bottom of the drain, at the tiny trickle of water threading down.

“I don’t appreciate being referred to as a mess.” Niki joked somewhere behind him. “That’s so rude.”

“You know I don’t mean you.”

A light went on in his head. “I want to see the video footage.” He said suddenly

Niki looked confused. “What?”

“From when you went missing. Do you have it?” The adults shared looks, taken completely off guard.

“I don’t think so.” Techno said cautiously. “We had no reason to keep it.”

“I don’t know, Tubbo might have access to it?” Niki said doubtfully. “But he did say he deleted it from Schlatt’s emails. He’s probably not even awake, you might have to talk to him tomorrow.”

“That’s fine.”

“Why the sudden interest if I may ask?”

“I need to know.” He said simply. “I need to get the full picture, I’m done hearing everything second hand. I need this.”

“We’ll talk to Ranboo, see if he can take us back.” Niki suggested. “If Tubbo’s asleep you can stay with me and talk to him in the morning, if it’s that important.”

“It is.”

They headed back into the office, Tommy clambering up the ladder first, suddenly determined. Ranboo was sat in the corner with Kristin, looking a little better, Phil and Wilbur hunched over something. The elder looked up when they came in with a relieved expression. He opted not to ask any questions, seeing the look of determination on Tommy’s face. Niki got there first, pushing him behind her.

“Ranboo can you take us back home?” She asked gently. “We should get you back and Tommy needs to talk to someone.”

Ranboo nodded weakly. "Who's coming with us?"

"Just me and Tommy and Techno."

"I'll come." Wilbur volunteered, standing up. "It's too late for more work." He reached out his hand, grabbing onto them all.

He dropped them off on the path outside the bakery, now closed and locked up for the night. It was later than Tommy had thought, barely anyone outside, most of the lights off. Wilbur took Ranboo's arm, leading him away, the two of them talking quietly. Niki unlocked the door with a key looped onto her belt, pushing it open, walking through the empty tables, the chairs stacked on top for the night.

A light was on in the kitchen. Tubbo was sat at the table on his laptop, wrapped up in a blanket. He blinked owlishly as Niki came in, breaking into a shy smile.

"You're still awake?" She asked.

"Yeah. I was waiting for you to come back." He sat back, spotting the people behind him, the smile dying a little. "Oh."

"I need to ask something." Tommy jumped in immediately. The hybrid eyed him suspiciously.

"What is it?"

"Do you have the CCTV footage? From when Niki...you know."

Tubbo eyed him warily, tugging his blanket a little tighter around his shoulders. "I do. Why?"

"I want to see it." He said, starting to get a little nervous. "I need to know."

"Are you sure?"

"I'm sure. I think I'm ready." Tubbo didn't make any further argument, turning away. A few moments passed in silence as he began to navigate through a maze of files.

"I kept it in case I needed it, I don't know why I would but I'm paranoid." He said, opening a file up. He glanced over his shoulder, as if expecting him to change his mind, but Tommy just nodded.

"Go on. I want to see."

The footage was a little grainy, and in black and white for the most part, the sound fed through a poor quality mic, but it was there. It was just empty canal path for a bit, and then they appeared around the corner, walking innocently on their rounds, Tsunami walking ahead, Theseus's hood pulled up,

kicking stones into the water lazily. It felt oddly like an out of body experience, he barely remembered any of this, let alone watching himself walk through it in the third person.

Achilles stepped out from behind him, a dark shadow, a blade pressed to Theseus's throat. Niki carried on for a few steps, not realising he'd fallen behind. She turned back, her expression hidden but he remembered how the horror had flooded into her eyes.

Tommy touched his throat, as if he could still feel the ghost of the knife. "You used me as a hostage."

"It was effective." Techno said, not sounding apologetic in the slightest. "It doesn't hurt that the Agency aren't aware I don't hurt children. The knife was pretty blunt."

Tsunami didn't hesitate, water rushing up from the river, engulfing Achilles's head, covering his nose and mouth. He drew back, not letting go of his hostage, the water falling around him as his powers neutralise hers, but they had no way of getting rid of the water itself. She took full advantage of his distraction, running over and forcing an arm between the blade and Theseus's throat to protect him, a wave rising up from the river again, swamping Achilles, not a drop landing on her apprentice's head.

"Hold in there Theseus!" She reached for her communicator and his heart leapt into his throat. "I need hel-." a gunshot rang out.

Tommy flinched even over video, turning his head away as she crumpled to the ground at his feet. Techno's hand tightened on his shoulder, and he almost leant into it, blissfully unaware of the irony of that tiny gesture. He turned back to find Orpheus knelt down next to her, frantically checking for a pulse.

"I'm so, I'm so sorry, I panicked." He said desperately. She didn't reply, hand pressed to the small of her back, curled up in a ball.

"We have to go, now." Achilles glanced around. "Someone could have heard that."

"I'm not leaving without her." Orpheus said stubbornly. Tsunami pushed herself up, clearly struggling for breath. "Hey. No hard feelings." He said quickly, holding up his hands. "Nothing personal."

"Are you kidding me. You better run." She managed. "They heard me."

"They won't come. They treat you like shit, we can help you." Orpheus managed. "I intended to have more time for this spiel but..."

“Don’t try and butter me up.” She hissed. “I know damn well how they treat me.” Orpheus narrowed his eyes, and then changed tracks.

“We can take you somewhere safe.”

“Do you think I’m stupid?” She retorted, as much disdain loaded into those words as she could manage.

“No. But I think you’re hurt, and that was my fault, I’d really rather you didn’t die and I know someone who can help you.” He said, a little guiltily. She looked taken aback even with the mask on, but she recovered quickly

“I don’t need your help.”

“You won’t make it back to the Agency, and if you go back, you won’t be safe.” He said firmly.

“You’ve caught the wrong people’s attention. Our base is closer, but the moment you go inside, you can’t leave. It’s up to you.”

“And what’s in it for you?”

“We can...”

“You were kind to Ranboo.” Achilles interrupted quietly. “And he speaks very highly of you. For that, we can help you.”

“Ranboo?” The realisation dawned slowly. “Oh my god.”

Orpheus’s head whipped round. “Why did you tell her that!”

“She’s not stupid. And she’s coming with us either way, she goes back to the Agency and she dies.”

Tommy leaned forward, intrigued. Techno put a comforting hand on his shoulder, and for once, he didn’t shrug it away.

“Tsunami?” Theseus’s voice shook. Tommy looked away, hating how pathetic he sounded. When he looked back Achilles had let him go. He reached for his communicator, clearly intending to call back up or something

“*Don’t.*” His hand stopped short, and the villain reached out, grabbing it. He tried to wrestle him off, but Orpheus won, pulling it away, tossing it into the river. “Say your goodbyes.” He said in a surprisingly gentle tone. “You might not see her again, she’ll be safe, but if we take the both of you they’ll ask too many questions.”

“I.” Before he could do anything stupid that he no doubt had planned Tsunami staggered to her feet, pulling him into a tight hug.

“Don’t. Stay safe. Maybe I’ll see you again.”

“What are you doing?” His past self whispered. “You can’t just accept this.”

“I’ve been in this for so long.” She said gently. “Far longer than you have, I’m so tired.”

“They’ll kill you.” He said, confused, “You can’t do this.”

“I’m not making it back to the Agency in time, I’m done fighting. I’ll go with you.” She told Orpheus, rallying up some kind of buried strength to keep standing. “But only on the condition that you let him go safe.”

“What! Are you crazy?”

She looked up at Orpheus, not able to meet Theseus’s eyes. “Please don’t hurt him.”

“I won’t,” Orpheus promised. “But we can’t just let him go, not with what he knows.”

“You can wipe people’s memories, right?” Orpheus nodded cautiously. “Someone needs to tell HQ I’m gone.”

He nodded, understanding instantly. *“You were on patrol Theseus, it was an ambush, you couldn’t even call for help. You heard a gunshot, you’re sure she’s dead. The only other thing you remember is me.”* Theseus staggered back, clutching his head. *“Now sleep.”* He crumpled to the ground, Orpheus catching him so he didn’t hurt himself, lying him down

Achilles picked Tsunami up like she weighed nothing at all, disappearing into the fading light. Orpheus followed, hesitating at the very edge of the camera’s range, looking back over his shoulder at the small figure lying prone on the ground. The quality wasn’t good enough to work out what he said, out of range of sound and too pixelated for lip reading really, but he could have sworn he saw him mouth an apology, before disappearing after his brother.

Tubbo shut the laptop lid abruptly, breaking them out of a kind of trace. Tommy sat back, feeling very hollow all of a sudden, a slight headache starting to pound against his temples. “I don’t remember any of that.”

“You weren’t supposed to.” Techno said calmly.

“That’s so weird.” He was silent for quite a while, just staring at the blank screen. “You tried to kill her and then saved her life.”

“Not what we set out to do.” He admitted. “We weren’t sure what would happen, but Ranboo assured us we had a reasonable chance of pulling her out.”

“And then?”

“The hospital Kristin was in, Wilbur said you noticed it was very reinforced. I think he said he told you it was rich people being paranoid, well he lied.” Niki added. “As it turns out the doctors there are paid quite a bit not to ask about patients, it’s very heavily sponsored by Phil’s company.”

“Wait for real?” Tubbo glanced up. “That’s smart.” That got him the edge of a dry smile from Techno.

“Phil thinks of everything.”

“I got some of the best health care out there, rather than a quick patch job by Supreme.” Niki continued. “Not just for the bullet, but for my back, and knees and all the other injuries that never got cared for. They kept their promise and more.”

“And just left me on the river bank.” He said sarcastically. “Seems about right.”

“Orpheus stuck around until he saw you leave. It was the least we could do.” Techno corrected. “I would have done more, but we had to keep you safe from suspicion as well.”

“You were...looking out for me?”

“Always have.” Techno agreed, a kind of finality to his words. “Always will.”

Chapter End Notes

Boom

May come back in the morning and redo this, but if I think about this chapter any longer I was going to chicken out of posting it. It always happens with the important chapters, I get so nervous

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It's the Bear Necessities

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Tommy slumped back, a wave of exhaustion hitting him now the adrenaline rush had faded, and Techno stepped away. Tubbo leaned over and shut his laptop quickly, snatching it back. "Happy?"

"Yeah. Thanks."

The other boy's expression turned a little less defensive, as if he'd suddenly remembered where he was. "Sure."

"Why don't you go to bed." Niki said gently. "I'll come say goodnight in a bit." Tubbo's expression soured and he glared at her, but only got a smile in response. "Don't get embarrassed now."

He muttered something, and then trotted off, wrapped up in his blanket with his laptop clutched tightly to his chest almost as if he was afraid someone would take it. A short silence followed, his footsteps disappearing up the stairs.

"We should head back." She said finally. "We need to get you back home."

"But..."

"It's late, and you've been working. We can sort this out tomorrow." There was a sort of kind understanding, and she reached out for Tommy, holding out her arm for a hug. He accepted it, holding on to her for a few seconds as if to assure himself she was real, that she was really there, before pulling away abruptly, turning to the wall.

"Do you know the way back? Or should we ask Ranboo, I don't know if he's still around though." She said, worried. "He didn't look too good."

"Ranboo's out here." Wilbur called in, the other boy poking his head in after. He looked like he'd composed himself a little, both of them looking somber, but he managed a smile as they came out.

"Taxi?"

"If you don't mind." Niki said cautiously. "It won't tire you out will it."

"Phil didn't bring his car, I'll have to take him home anyway." He held out his hand to Tommy and Techno, Niki shaking her head.

"I'll stay, or you'll just have to bring me back again. I'll see you in a bit?"

"See you."

They appeared in the Syndicate room again, Kristin rising to her feet as they arrived. "Where did you go?" She hurried over. "I thought you went back home."

“To Niki’s house.” Ranboo clarified. “Tommy wanted to see something.” He dropped his arm and she gave them both a once over.

“You alright?”

“They’ll be okay.” Techno said gruffly for them, neither of them moving to speak. “Rough evening.” She nodded understandingly

“We’re heading back now; you can both get some rest.”

“Wait but what about the recording.” Ranboo said, confused. “Aren’t we going to do something about it?”

“We can’t do much about it now.” Phil said firmly. “We’ll work this out once we’ve had time to rest and think about it.”

“I don’t wanna sleep.” Tommy whined. “I’m fineeee.”

“Your eyes are bloodshot.” He dragged a hand over them.

“Yeah that’s different.”

“Even more reason you should rest.” He shook his head stubbornly, holding out his hand to teleport them, dropping them off just inside the front porch, out of sight. Ranboo turned to go but Kristin caught his arm.

“Are you staying over?” She asked.

“I. Probably sleep in Haven tonight. I need some space.”

“Alright, but if you feel alone you come straight here.” She told him. “We’ll see you tomorrow?”

“Yeah. That would be nice.” He replied awkwardly. She pulled him into a quick hug, before he vanished into the dark again. Tommy stumbled away, making it about as far as the lounge, collapsing down on the couch and curling up in a ball.

Hushed voices talked back and forth out in the corridor with that odd echo they seem to get late at night, footsteps shifting around him.

“Lets get you upstairs.” Phil’s voice said quietly, somewhere above his head, a hand settling on his shoulder. “You can’t sleep down here.”

“Fuck off dad.” He shook him off, turning over to bury his head in a pillow. He didn’t notice Phil go dead still, hovering over his arm.

“Did he just...”

“Wilbur called me mum the other day as he was walking out the door.” Kristin said quietly. “I don’t think he ever realised.”

“If I know Will he knew damn well what he was doing.” Phil said, amused. “He drives me up the wall sometimes.”

“Boys.” Kristin said fondly. “Don’t they all. Tommy come on.” She shook him gently. “Upstairs.” He vaguely remembered staggering up the stairs, and then nothing much after that.

He woke at midday, staggering down the stairs and sitting himself down in the kitchen, gazing forlornly at the cupboard as if the cereal would jump into his plate without having to walk over if he just stared at it long enough

“Good afternoon.”

“Wait what’s the time?” He jumped to his feet, looking around for the clock, panicked.

“It’s Sunday.” Kristin took his shoulder, sitting him down. “Relax. You’ve got the day off.”

“Wait it is?”

“You work too hard.” She said kindly. “Yes, it is, so make the most of it.”

“Tommy!” Wilbur shoved his head around the door, making him jump. Tommy scowled at him.

“What?”

“I’m going shopping, you coming?”

“Nah mum says I have to have a day off.” He shot back.

“No, I think it’s a great idea.” Kristin interrupted, nodding along.

“Wait what?” The betrayal showed on his face immediately. “I haven’t even had breakfast yet.”

“We can get breakfast. Lunch. Whatever.” Wilbur waved it aside. Tommy turned to Kristin pleadingly, trying to get some kind of support but she just shook her head.

“Go on. He’s making an effort.”

“This is a terrible idea.”

“It’ll be good for you.”

He shook his head adamantly. “I don’t like this.”

“I know you don’t.”

“I want it on record. I think this is stupid.”

“Your protest is duly noted and ignored.” Wilbur grabbed his wrist, tugging him towards the door, and he cast a desperate look back at Kristin, although didn’t put half as much of a fight up as he could have, almost letting Will drag him out to the car. As soon as the door slammed shut he turned on him.

“What the hell was that about?” He complained

“Dad was talking about spring cleaning and chores. I thought I’d save us both.” Wilbur popped a toffee in his mouth, holding out the bag. “You’re welcome, by the way.”

“Fuck you.” He snatched the bag, stuffing one in his mouth. “So where are we going?”

He shrugged. “Haven’t a clue. Kind of planned this on the fly. Where do you want to go?”

“Dunno, didn’t want to be here.”

“Kristin said you need breakfast, we’ll do that first.” He decided. “Wasn’t there that waffle place you liked? We could go there.”

Tommy stopped; cheeks stuffed with toffees. “Wait how do you know about that.”

“We literally went there with you.” He replied, amused. “But you probably don’t remember, you were asleep for most of it.”

“Yeah cos I fucking burned myself out stopping a roof collapsing on a party the day before.” Tommy leant his head on his shoulder to glare at Wilbur. “Wonder how that happened.”

“Oops.” A wry smile crossed his lips.

“Oops? That’s all you have to say?”

“Yes.” He didn’t even hesitate, his attention on the road and not his passenger so he didn’t see Tommy sink back, glaring at him.

“Fuck you.”

“Wasn’t my fault.”

“Literally was directly your fault, what are you talking about.” Tommy hissed.

“You know what, I don’t want to fight today.” He said tiredly. “Not over that. We’re going to go get waffles and you don’t have to talk to me about anything but you’re going to let me treat you for once.”

“I don’t like you.”

“I know.” Wilbur sounded very weary all of a sudden, a kind of hurt flickering across his face, like he already knew it was coming. Then it gone again and he was back to being cheerful, humming along to the music someone was blasting out of their car.

He carried on humming it after it left, swerving off into the city centre as they turned out towards the mall, Tommy glaring sheer daggers at him.

It didn't last long. They parked in the mall car parking, Tommy leading the way to the diner, not speaking at all. As soon as he walked in though he was completely distracted from his annoyance, a host of memories flooding back, of birthdays and very different, much simpler times. He slid down into an empty booth in the far corner, stealing the window seat.

"What do you want?" Wilbur snatched one of the menus, waving it at him, trying to make some kind of conversation. Tommy patted his pockets.

"Fuck, forgot my card and shit."

"I'm paying." He volunteered. "Don't worry about it."

He immediately stopped looking, sitting up. "Sure, give me all your money."

"I mean it's dad's money." Tommy immediately pulled a face. "Not like that, I work for him and he pays me, I earned it."

"Sure. Whatever. I'll just have a fat stack of waffles. The most expensive one." He said it like a challenge but got nothing in response, the elder just waved a waitress over, talking to her quietly while Tommy stared out of the window, watching the flowers in the planter sway from side to side.

"What's on your mind." He jumped, whipping around to glare at Wilbur accusingly. "You seem distracted."

"I saw the tape. Of. You know, her joining." He dropped his voice carefully. "Last night."

"Joining is a bit of a loose term. She was nearly dead on her feet, mentally and physically, and only one was my fault." He replied, surprisingly light-hearted for what he was saying.

"You just walked up to a working hero and told her to join a terrorist organisation."

Wilbur smirked, leaning on the edge of the table. "We're that good." His eyes were alert, glancing around the restaurant but no one was even looking at them, let alone paying attention to what was being said. "Maybe we can talk about this later."

"I'll just say I'm talking about a show." Tommy stretched, yawning. "They'll believe me. I look trustworthy, Kristin said so."

"Kristin was lying to you."

"Bitch."

"You're a terrible liar." Wilbur continued. "You wear every emotion on your sleeve. Which isn't a bad thing, I'm the same."

The waitress set down a huge stack of waffles in front of him, heaped with sauce and berries and whipped cream. His face lit up and he dug into it hungrily, ignoring Wilbur completely as the elder was handed a stack of pancakes, picking at them a little more delicately instead.

He began to slow after a while, the sheer amount of food proving a fair challenge, stuffed full and almost a little too much. He rested his fork on the plate, watching the weekend crowds pass by outside.

The bell over the door chimed and a family walked in, just an ordinary family, two parents swinging their son between them, a younger boy holding onto their other hand, maybe six or seven, looking carefree, like nothing in the world mattered to them as they picked a booth and slid in, chattering away happily.

A lump welled up in his throat, and he turned his head away, staring at the flowers again. They were sunflowers, not quite fully grown yet but he'd recognise them anywhere, Kristin always had them in the kitchen when they came into season, and when they were over she'd wait until the petals had all fallen off, and then leave the seeds for the birds. He'd watch them for hours as they pecked away at it.

"Tommy?" Wilbur prompted

"What?"

"You kind of, I don't know, zoned out again." He leaned forward, resting his elbows on the table. "What are you thinking?"

"I miss home." He stared at his food, pushing it around his plate.

"At least that one wasn't us." He said lightly and then looked thoughtful. "We can go there after." he offered. "I don't think there's much left but we can."

"Probably don't even let people near anymore." He jabbed his fork into the last waffle with a particular vengeance.

The older boy cracked a grin. "Yeah, but our dad owns the company that bought the land."

"I forgot about that." Tommy admitted. "You know, you don't act rich."

"What am I supposed to act like? A pretentious prick?" He held up a hand. "Actually, don't answer that."

"Wait our dad?" He asked quizzically

"Mine and Techno's." Wilbur corrected himself quickly, scooping up his car keys. "Are you done?"

"Yeah." He shovelled another bite of his food down, pushing the rest away in defeat and sitting up. "Are we going?"

"Sure." Wilbur slipped a tip over to the waitress, hopping out and heading towards the door. "Lets get you out of here before you throw up."

"I'm fine." Tommy complained. "I didn't eat that much." Will raised an eyebrow.

"Are you sure?"

“Can we not walk too fast?” He only got laughed at.

They walked towards the car, Wilbur balancing on the edge of the pavement absentmindedly. “I’m not that spoiled. I don’t think.” He said suddenly. “I was just thinking about it. I can be pretentious but I could be worse.” He shuddered. “You should see some of the rich people in this city.”

“Yeah you’re just pretentious, not rich pretentious.” Tommy said smugly, trying to annoy him but Wilbur just accepted it.

“It definitely helps that I never really got the chance to grow up without being very aware of where I came from.” He agreed

“Good for you.” Tommy said, suddenly glum. “I don’t have a clue.”

Wilbur glanced up, curious. “No?”

Tommy shook his head. “It was ages ago. I don’t remember much.”

“No parents, no nothing?” He pressed.

“Nah, group home then Mum got me. That’s it really.”

Wilbur nodded slowly. “Do you ever wonder?”

“Do you?”

“Not really. I have Techno, and Dad.” He said. “I’m pretty happy with that for now.”

“Same.”

They went silent again, getting into the car. Wilbur fastened his seatbelt, turning to look at him with a grin. “See, we have something in common.” That earned him another glare.

“We met while you were carrying out a terrorist operation and I was trying to protect people, we couldn’t be more different.” Tommy said sourly.

“That’s true. I never really thought of it that way.” His expression softened a little. “Huh.”

“That wasn’t a good memory.” Tommy snapped. “Stop looking like that. You fucking did that.”

“I did.” He replied confidently. “And I know that the Warden can use shields that big. It’s well within his power to make one to hold the roof up. He could have, he should have, but he didn’t.”

“What?”

“Am I wrong? Is he capable of that?” Tommy nodded, confused.

“Of course he is. Haven’t you seen him?” He stopped to swear at a lorry driver who nearly slammed into them as they pulled out, waving a middle finger out the window.

“Then why didn’t he? We were counting on him doing that, we knew he could. But he chose to show you off instead, chose to have his hero moment because he wanted to prove himself in front of a bunch of rich people, in front of Schlatt, because the next day all that was splashed across the newspapers a picture of him outside the building, and not a word of what you did. He chose to do that at the expense of you.”

“He knew I could handle it.” Tommy snapped. “Just as you knew he could. It’s not about the headlines.”

“You’re a kid.” Wilbur’s expression had turned stormy. “That is a whole grown man, he should know better.”

“Kind of rich coming from you.”

“We planned it! No one was going to get hurt, it was full of heroes, the Warden was there, it was a statement, nothing else. The roof wasn’t even meant to collapse that much, we underestimated how weak the structure had gotten because the government won’t spend a fucking penny on the repairs it needed.”

He opened his mouth, and then fell silent again. “You really can’t blame this on them.”

“I’m not.” Wilbur said, exasperated. “We did it, I take full credit for that. I’m just trying to say there was no intent to hurt anybody. I guess what I’m trying to say is sorry in a stupid long-winded way, I didn’t know, I didn’t know it would get that bad, I didn’t know you’d be dragged in, I didn’t even know who you were.”

Tommy just huffed, staring out the window, not really knowing what to say to that.

They turned up the hill into the burned-out district, and he couldn’t tear his eyes away. There was no smoke still rising like last time, the dust had settled. The houses had been gutted of any last remains, any standing walls stripped away, the debris scattered in the road all cleared.

It was already in the process of being cleared up, rubble being carried away by the truckful, workers in high visibility jackets scuttling around in a frenzy.

“It’s busy for a Sunday.” Tommy noted.

“Dad’s been throwing a lot of people into this, he’s paying them extra and everything.” Wilbur agreed. “A lot of people don’t have anywhere to go so the government has given us plenty of incentives to build faster and take them off their hands.”

He pulled up between a few other cars, hopping out. “Wait here.” A more officious-looking man with a clipboard spotted him, moving to try and head him off

“I’m sorry, you can’t be here.”

Wilbur pulled a lanyard out of his pocket, holding it out. “I’m here with the company. Needed to check something out.”

“Oh.” He backtracked so fast Tommy almost sniggered. “I’m sorry Mr Watson, I didn’t recognise you.” Wilbur gave him a thumbs up, waving Tommy after him.

“He’s with me. Over here.” He gestured to an unrecognisable pile of rubble on some foundations.

“That doesn’t seem right.”

“It’s definitely here.” He insisted. “Trust me.” Tommy stepped over the remains of the porch, looking around sadly. It still smelled of smoke but damp now, mildew and rot overlaying it. Ashes coated his shoes, a cold wind whistling over the building site.

“It’s even worse than last time.”

“It’s been stripped already. Well, half stripped.” He kicked a book, completely ruined by water, the pages illegible. “They still have a lot of stuff to go.”

“This is wrong. The kitchen used to be here.” Tommy said absentmindedly, tracing a circle on the floor with his foot. “Kristin would sit up and wait for me when I was working late sometimes.” He turned. “She had a bunch of jars across the shelf of pasta and shit, could’ve left it in the bag but she said it was prettier.” There was nothing but shattered glass left in its place.

“It’s a little bit depressing,” Wilbur said honestly.

“Then why did you offer to take me here?”

“I assumed you know what it looked like last time.” He spun his car keys around his finger, looking around. “And also, I’m planning to bring you back while we rebuild, so you can see every stage of it. Makes it feel a bit more like it’s yours, you know?”

“It won’t be the same.”

“No, it won’t.” He agreed. “It’ll never be the same, but it’s the best we can do. Best I can do.” Tommy wandered away a little, careful with his footing over the rubble as he traced the outline of the lounge from memory alone.

Nothing remained to mark the walls he knew anymore, save for a melted pile of metal and shattered glass in the corner that had once been a television, but in his head he could still see it.

“Ready to go?” Tommy nodded, subdued. He started trudging back towards the road, dragging his feet. Wilbur strode ahead, the younger trailing behind

He stopped in his tracks. “Wait!” He dived towards a fallen beam, grabbing onto something and tugging it, but it was fully trapped, giving no ground. “Help me.” Will walked over skeptically, grabbing onto one end, heaving at it with a surprising amount of strength. It jostled loose a little, just enough that Tommy could drag his find out, throwing it to the floor between them.

It was a soft toy of some kind, fur was stained black with soot and soaked through with water, it stunk, and looked miserable, crusted with debris, almost unrecognisable. Wilbur squinted at it, prodding it with his foot.

“What’s that?”

“It’s the bear Techno got me.” Tommy stated as if it was obvious. “From the arcade. Remember?”

“Oh.” He blinked a few times, tilting his head as if it would make more sense that way. “When we went to get Niki baking stuff.”

“Wait what?” He stared at him. Will waved it aside with one hand. “Forget I said that. Anyway, it didn’t get burned. That’s great. Kind of destroyed now though.”

“Yeah.” Tommy knelt down next to it, staring at it.

“We should probably bin it.” He added.”

“I don’t know. It was from before and all. I didn’t really have it for long but like.” He made a kind of flailing gesture with his hands as if he couldn’t quite find the words. Wilbur looked thoughtful for a second, reading his expression, seeming to make his mind up about something

“Well in that case.” He said. “I think I’ve got some bin bags in my car. We’ll put it in one and take it home and I don’t know, see what we can do.”

“Wait what?” Tommy looked up. “For real?”

“Yeah. I really don’t think we can salvage it but we might as well try if it means something.” He scrunched his face up, and then snatched it by the least grimy leg, dragging it down the stairs. “Let’s go then.”

He dragged it down the path, yanking the back open, stuffing it into a trash bag and tying the top closed tightly. “Quick, before this thing stinks up my car.”

“What are we doing with it.” Tommy pulled himself into the passenger seat. “Where are we going?”

“Home.” He raised a hand to the security guard who’d let them in as they drove off. “Seems a good place to start.”

“Shouldn’t we go to a laundromat, or something?”

“Nah, we can just wash it at home.” Wilbur held out his phone. “Ring Kristin for me?”

Tommy snatched it off him, typing in Kristin’s name. “You don’t have her in your contacts? I can add her if you...”

“Oh.” He laughed. “Look up Phil’s future girlfriend. I added it a while back.”

Tommy stared at him in horror and then typed it in slowly. “You’re fucking dead for this.” He pressed call, glaring daggers at him. It rung for a minute or so, no one picking it up, and he tried again. This time it only rang for a few seconds, a radio switching off in the background.

“Hello?” Kristin sounded concerned. “Is everything alright?”

“Yeah just fine.” Will replied cheerfully. “Can you run a bath, we kinda need it.”

“What have you done.” She asked suspiciously. Wilbur grinned.

“Yeah I accidentally pushed Tommy into a puddle, he looks kind of grim, might have to clean the whole car.”

“You what!”

“I’m joking, I’m joking.” He backed down quickly, winking at Tommy. “It’s actually for a bear.”

“Did you drag Tommy into this.”

“Absolutely it’s his bear.” Wilbur said sagely. “He insisted on it.”

“I did.” Tommy chimed in. “It’s a big bear too.”

“Wilbur Watson if you’ve bought home an actual bear your father is going to murder you.” She sounded doubtful, but at the same time there was an edge of uncertainty.

“Hey what about Tommy! He made me do it. Also the old man couldn’t if he tried.”

“Then I will.” She said lightly, before sighing. “I’ll run the bath but if you make a mess of the bathroom you’re tidying it up.”

“Tommy’s tidying it up.” Wilbur agreed.

“Oi!”

She just laughed. “Alright. I’ll see you in a bit.”

“Is Phil around?” He asked quickly, before she put the phone down.

“Uh no, he went to the park with Ranboo a while ago. Want me to pass something on to him?”

“We’ll be back soon, it’s fine. Byeaaaa.” He cut off the call. “So now we’ve told her that do you think we can get away with bringing a cat home.”

“A cat? Where the hell are we going to get a cat from?” Tommy asked, completely taken off guard by the sudden switch in conversation. Wilbur just shrugged.

“I don’t know, we kidnap one? Catnap one? I’ve always wanted a cat.”

“You can’t just steal someone’s cat!”

“Killjoy.” His expression was completely blank, giving nothing away, his eyes never shifting from the road.

“I can’t tell if you’re joking.” He set the phone down slowly, narrowing his eyes at him.

“Good.”

It wasn’t far to Phil’s house, especially not with Wilbur’s somewhat reckless driving. Tommy barely waited for the car to stop before hopping out, dragging the bag after him. Kristin was stood on the stairs, arms folded, eyes narrowed suspiciously. “What did you do?”

“Nothing.” He said innocently. She gave a quick look over the car, and the bag, and when she’d decided there really wasn’t a real living bear she relaxed slightly. Will jumped out behind him, grinning widely.

“You didn’t really think we would, did you?”

She glared at him, hands on her hips. “You’ve done stranger.”

He pressed a hand to “Ma’am I’m wounded.”

“Call me ma’am again and you will be. Anyway I meant Tommy.”

“It was a racoon. Not a bear!” Tommy protested immediately.

“It scratched your arm so bad we had to take you to the hospital.” She reminded him. He pulled his sleeve up, showing a silvery scratch across his elbow, craning his neck to get a look at it.

“Yeah but like I have a cool scar from it.” His eyes lit up. “I have a lot of cool scars from work. You should see the bullet wounds, they’re so cool.”

Wilbur was speechless for a few seconds and then sighed dramatically, swinging the rubbish bag over one shoulder, using his other arm to drag Tommy into a light headlock, dragging him along after him through the door. “You concern me you know.”

“Fuck you! Let me go!”

Wilbur gave Kristin a suffering look. “Is he always like this...Fuck!” He yanked his arm free. “He just bit me!”

Kristin nodded sagely. “He does that.”

“Are you not the least bit concerned about that?”

“I was more worried about the bear. I think I’ve used up my worry now. The bath is upstairs.” Wilbur scowled, but strode off, Tommy following him smugly. She was smiling as they went, head turned away a little so they couldn’t see.

He threw the bag down on the floor. The bath was already half full, she’d put some kind of bath soap into it so it was covered with bubbles.

“I don’t know how we’re going to dry it out afterwards but we’ll work that out later.” Wilbur opened the bag, wrinkling his nose, dumping it into the bubbles. “Just going to leave it there.” The water immediately turned grey, and he paused, looking at it. “Oh well.”

He perched on a chair in the corner, and Tommy slumped against the wall, staring at the tap. The only sound in the bathroom was running water, both of them staring at the bubbles forming as the foam bubbled up.

“We could fill it full of bleach.” Wilbur said thoughtfully, gazing off somewhere into the distance. “That’ll do the trick.”

“You’ve never had to do your washing in your life.”

“Actually I’ve gotten very good at getting stains out.” He got in calm reply

“I don’t get it...oh.” He fell into an awkward silence, tracing the patterns of the tiles on the walls with a finger. Wilbur just chuckled, completely unbothered.

He was staring somewhere off into the middle distance, humming to himself again, that stupid song from the car and Tommy watched him. He seemed distracted, tapping his foot, thinking about something.

“You know I don’t think I said, but I’m sorry. About your brother.” Tommy said quietly. “It must have been awful.”

Wilbur blinked. “Wait where did that come from?”

Tommy just shrugged. “I don’t know. We were talking about family in the car earlier.”

“What does my brother have to do with that?”

“Dunno. Family, home, that kinda shit. Just been thinking.”

“Sap.” He teased, leaning over to ruffle Tommy’s hair. “I didn’t know you were such a softie.” He teased, trying him up and immediately succeeding.

“I’ll fucking bite you again.”

Wilbur shrugged. “It’s alright, he’s always with me.” He said, suddenly more somber. “Phil and Techno taught me that. It’s not so bad these days.”

“And you call me a fucking sap.”

That just got a grin in response. “Me? Never. Besides, where’s all this talk about brothers coming from.”

“I don’t know.” He turned away a little.

“Liar. Go on.” Wilbur encouraged. “What are you thinking.”

“I wish I had a brother.” Tommy pulled his knees up to his chest, resting his head on his arms. “Being a single child is shit. At least you have Techno.”

“I mean...” His eyes practically sparkled

“Not you bitch. A nice brother. Like Techno or someone, someone who listens to me.”

Wilbur’s expression softened again, and this time he wasn’t fast enough to dodge the shampoo bottle that flew right at him. The sounds of shrieking drifted all the way down the stairs to the kitchen, Kristin raising her head from the stove, Techno giving her a knowing look.

“At least they’re getting on better.”

A heavy thud, followed by a string of swearing. Techno gave her a sceptical look. “Sure. If that’s what you want to call it.”

Chapter End Notes

You guysss, we're nearly at 1k kudos that's insane, thank you so much! I never thought this silly little fic could get that far, i really appreciate it <3

Anyway, I'm back. Writers block is wild but I missed y'all, hoping to get slightly more regular updates out, and hopefully my new pokemon benchtrio, and a vigilante!tommy au will be out as well so keep an eye out for those two, they're called the Road not Taken and Kings Gambit and will be going up in the next few weeks I think

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Chapter 56

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Tommy collapsed against the wall, out of breath and a little bruised. Wilbur hair was all in his eyes, a little wild-eyed, swaying from side to side. He straightened up, shaking his arms out. "I win."

"No you didn't bitch."

"Definitely did."

"Did not."

"Did too."

"Did fucking not." He slumped back.

"We should probably just let it soak for a bit." Wilbur said instead, changing the subject. He turned to Tommy, and then wrinkled his nose. "You need to get changed. You got it all over you."

"I'm not that bad." He looked down to find it was indeed that bad, a streak of ash and mud up his front where he'd dragged it out, and now it was across Wilbur's clothes as well, smeared by the wrestling. "Eh it's fine."

"It's not fine." He grabbed the back of his shirt, tugging Tommy along, barely pulling him at all, not that anyone would have been able to tell with the storm of protests he put up as he was unceremoniously pushed into his room. Wilbur strode over to his closet, starting to pull shirts out of his drawers.

"Damn these are ugly." He held up a blank red one. "Do you have anything else." Tommy ignored him, trying to scrub a bit of mud off that had dried on his arm. He kept sorting through his drawers, making noises of dismay, yanking another t-shirt out, "Damn. Are they all the same?"

"If it bothers you stop going through my stuff asshole." Wilbur looked as if he was about to respond, but he made an unintelligible noise instead, holding something up with an odd look on his face. It was the bag of clothes from the mall, all in Tommy's size, untouched. Never worn.

"I was going to wear them." Tommy jumped to defend himself immediately. "Just never did."

"You kept them." He said quietly. "Huh."

"Well yeah." He changed tracks. "Free shit, why wouldn't I."

Wilbur began to grin triumphantly. "Aww. Tommyyyyy."

"Fuck you bitch."

“Awww.”

“I’m going to fucking stab you.” He threatened. “I’ll kill you in your sleep.”

“Tommy! Be nice!” Kristin’s voice echoed up the stairs.

“I am being nice! I’m being very polite. You should hear me when I’m not polite!”

“I’d really rather not. Anyway, we’re leaving in a minute.” She called up. “Are you coming?”

“Where are you going?” Wilbur called back.

“Come to the stairs, so I don’t have to shout at you.” Came the good-natured reply. Wilbur grumbled, pulling himself up and propping the door open with a foot.

“What.”

“Phil and Ranboo went up to the park earlier, I think Tubbo might have been with them.” She relayed. “I’m taking a picnic up, and Techno’s helping me carry things.”

“Techno is carrying everything.” Techno corrected. “Doctors orders.”

“Show me on paper where the doctor said you have to carry everything for me and I’ll do it.” She shot back just as quickly.

Tommy snatched the bag off Wilbur, pulling out a random plain t-shirt and yanking it over his head, tossing the other one into a pile by the door and stumbling out onto the landing, head half out. Techno was stood at the bottom next to Kristin. He had a basket on one arm and a bag on the other, picnic blankets stuffed under his arms, carrying way too many things but somehow holding them all in place.

“Do you need a hand?” Tommy asked cautiously.

“Nah leave him, he’s fine.” Wilbur sauntered down the stairs, swiping his coat off the rack.

“He won’t let me carry it because I’m supposed to be resting,” Kristin said sourly. “I’ve tried, believe me.”

“It’s not that heavy.” He said diplomatically, but with a finality that said he too wasn’t interested in talking it over much further. Kristin glared at him for a few more moments, before cheering right up again.

“Fine.” She gave one last check around the kitchen. “I think that’s everything

“Did you take the…”

“Drinks out, yes.” He held up a cooler in his other hand. “And I got the biscuits you forgot.”

Kristin turned to them with a bright smile. “See he’s so helpful.”

“I’m being replaced.” Tommy said sourly. “And I don’t like it.”

“Oh, I would never.” She leaned over, giving him a quick hug. “But he does have nice manners.”

“When he’s not stabbing people.”

“I think you’ll find that’s true of quite a few people.” She replied calmly. “Now, you can take this.” She took the blanket out of under Techno’s arm before he could say anything, handing it to Tommy. “It’s light, and you can’t complain.”

“He definitely can.” Wilbur called back in, “And he will.” It was followed by very rapid footsteps across the gravel as Tommy chased him out, wielding the picnic blanket with a vengeance.

They began to make their way up the hill, Wilbur striding away at the front, the others following behind, Techno pulling up the rear. Tommy fell in beside him, a mischievous grin started to take hold.

“So. Last time we...”

“I already don’t like where this is heading, please don’t continue.” He intoned

“As I was saying, last time we were in the park...”

“I stand by what I said.” Techno added.

“So what is your weakness.” Tommy finished. “You said you had one, and you’d tell me, what is it.”

Techno blinked. “That a, wasn’t quite where I was expecting that to go, and b, is most certainly a lie, I never said I’d tell you.”

“So what is it?”

“I’m still not telling you.” He said tiredly, but still patient, shifting the weight of the basket under his arm. Tommy wasn’t taking that as an answer, pestering him all the way up, which the elder weathered with surprisingly good grace and an almost angelic amount of patience.

Kristin finally laughed overhearing them, and he was quickly distracted, about to turn on her instead. She looked more alive in the sunlight, the laugh felt lighter and less tired, even with the pallor her injuries, and the time inside had given her she looked more full of colour than she’d ever been, the lines nearly gone from her eyes.

“You look...happy.” He said finally.

“It’s nice having time to relax.” She pushed her hair out of her eyes, stopping at the top of the hill to catch her breath. “I don’t think I’ve had that for a while.”

They walked through the park gate, Techno having to angle himself to get in with everything he was carrying.

The park looked very different in daylight, almost painfully normal, just a green space with trees and a small pond at the far end, surrounded by a grove of trees that overlooked a sharp hill with a view of

the rest of the city far below. It was filled with families and couples spread out on blankets sunbathing or playing by the pond, busy and yet calm at the same time somehow.

Phil waved them over to a spot in the corner half in the shade, Ranboo stood next to him looking a little pleased with himself, another boy in an oversized shirt and a pair of nearly worn through dungarees that looked a little too big for him,

“Is that Tubbo?” Tommy asked, shocked. The goat hybrid grinned at him surprisingly easily, one arm holding onto his other elbow uncomfortably, but looking a little smug at taking him off guard. “Is this a good idea?”

“It’s fine.” Ranboo said quickly. “I checked with Phil.”

“The Enforcers are looking for him trying to flee the country or being kidnapped by a political opponent or something. They aren’t looking for a hybrid boy in a park in one of the richest districts in the city.” Phil explained. “It shouldn’t be an issue.”

“This feels wrong.”

Phil smiled slightly, an edge to it. “I think it’s funny.” He said. “We’re right under their noses.”

“You’re as bad as your sons.” Kristin told him firmly. “Tommy give me the blanket.” She was all in business mode already, ordering Techno around as he set down baskets. He handed it over automatically, still fixed on Tubbo.

“But wouldn’t they know?”

“There’s no way Schlatt told them I’m a hybrid.” Tubbo said confidently. “He’d be too scared of that getting out, and he thinks I am too.”

“Tommy would you mind giving me a hand.” Kristin intervened,

All kinds of sandwiches, with a few set aside wrapped in clingfilm filled with strawberry jam, and a small label in sharpie that had his name on it. He snatched them up, hiding them away, yanking open a bag of crisps, Kristin setting down a small sponge cake in a tubberware box, covering it with a kitchen cloth to keep it away from the sun.

Techno holding plates for her as she began to pile up food onto them, handing them out. Tommy almost snatched his plate up, beginning to Hoover it up in his usual style, barely stopping to hold a cup out for squash, gulping that down as well

“We literally had waffles like an hour ago.” Wilbur said disbelievingly. Tommy muttered something unintelligible through a mouthful of crisps, throwing up a middle finger, before going right back to it.

A kind of odd silence had fallen, Tubbo’s presence a silent elephant between them.

“Aren’t you scared? Of getting caught?” He asked finally. “Like honestly.”

Ranboo nodded. “Yeah. Very. But he’s been inside for most of his life it seems fair.” He was fidgeting with his sleeves, scrunching them up in his fist, fingers drumming on his leg anxiously. “I’ve been caught before.” He said suddenly.

Tommy's head whipped around. "You what?"

"As a kid." He amended quickly. "I gave them a fake name, and I don't look anything like I did then, didn't have any papers so they don't know it was me."

Tommy stared at him, eyes widening. "For real?"

"Yeah. Allium facility, I was there for a little while." Ranboo looked up at the sun casually to check the time, squinting his eyes.

"And, and they let you go?"

"Sure." The way he said that sounded a little evasive, his eyes darting towards the trees for a second. Tommy clocked on immediately.

"Then how did you get out?"

He gave him a grin, all white teeth and mischief. "Teleported right back out. It was before they worked out power suppressors. But even then, they don't really work on me."

Tommy's eyes widened a little further. "They don't?"

"Nope. They need external powers to work, mine are all internal, or at least, that's our theory."

"They're really experimental tech anyway," Tubbo pushed a sandwich in his mouth. "They don't tell you that, but they are, metas haven't existed long enough for them to even know why they work."

Phil stopped what he was doing, turning towards them. He made eye contact with Ranboo and shook his head silently. The boy immediately fell quiet, signalling for Tubbo to do the same

"Wait what? There's no one to overhear?" Tommy said, confused. Phil leaned over with a sympathetic look

"It's okay if you're curious, just quieten down a bit." He said gently. His eyes shot to Techno, making sure he was out of earshot and then back again. "I don't think I need to tell you whose powers those were based on, he doesn't say it but he's a little bit sensitive about the topic."

A cold chill ran down Tommy's spine, looking over at Techno who was blissfully oblivious to the conversation they were having. He couldn't shake the feeling that the more he heard about the SYndicate, the more he sympathised with them, and he just didn't know how to feel about that at all.

He went back to his food, his appetite suddenly gone. Tubbo was picking at it slowly, seemingly lost in thought. Ranboo nudged him gently, earning a glare in response, but it was half-hearted at best, preoccupied with picking the dandelions out of the grass, idle fingers weaving them into a crown.

He seemed oddly at ease for someone in as odd a situation as him, barely flinching when Enforcers passed the gates of the park as if he was numb to it all

“You there?” Tommy prompted him. “Anyone at home?”

“He’s not going to reply.”

“Well it’s not like he can’t talk.” Tommy pushed. “What is it?”

“If you have had a bad experience at Tubbo.com, please submit a customer service report, otherwise, please exit on the left.” Tubbo replied, deadpan.

“My god, he speaks.” Techno quipped, flicking through his book.

He looked away, that avenue of entertainment boring him, starting to watch the people heading past. A family with two kids, one running away, his father chasing after him, a student with a dog on a leash that was tugging towards every smell of food, a little boy clutching money in his hand, striding towards the icecream van on the far side with purpose, so incredibly normal it almost felt strange.

A woman walked past, completely inconspicuous at first, out of breath and in running gear, her keys clutched in her hand as she strode towards the south side of the park, with the determination of someone who was almost home.

It caught his eye as she passed, a pair of black wings on a keychain, once so innocent he wouldn’t have looked but now he watched them as she ran past, almost openly staring.

“Does Phil ever point those out?” He asked. Wilbur looked up confused, following his gaze. His eyes flickered for a second, taking in the woman’s face but there was no recognition.

“It’s safer not to.” He said quietly. “For anyone, let alone us.”

“As if you cared about safety.” Tommy mocked him. “You unmasked yourself to a random kid.”

Wilbur didn’t respond as quickly as he’d expected, mulling over it for a little while. “This family’s safety has been in my hands for...a very long time.” He said finally. “I get sick of it sometimes, it’s very lonely.”

“So... Your solution was to traumatise some guy in the kitchen at 3am.”

“You know when you put it like that.” He mused, a light smile playing across his lips. Tommy rolled his eyes, reaching a dead end to the attempt at winding him up, Wilbur giving no ground.

He wandered away a bit, past the children’s play area, pushing the roundabout around idly, the sun playing across his skin with a comfortable warmth. Phil and Kristin had walked a little way away, arm in arm, admiring the flower beds. He walked a little closer, intending to go and bother them or something, pacing back and forth in boredom.

“It’s beautiful.” She reached up, tugging one of the blossoms up to smell it, closing her eyes. Phil watched her quietly, humming in agreement. They looked like they lived in their own little bubble, totally unaware of the world around them, of the joggers or bicycles or families heading past. He ducked back towards the trees, suddenly feeling like an intruder.

She straightened up, pulling her summer dress out of the way of the dirt. “What’s on your mind?”

“Big things.” She looped her arm back into his

“What big things?”

“I never should have left without you.” He said quietly

She let that sink in, and then nodded slowly. “But we did.” She replied, with a kind of damning

“We did.” He agreed. “And we can’t change what we did.”

“If we hadn’t, you wouldn’t have made it.” She admitted sadly, letting the blossom go. “The three of you was enough of a risk as it was.”

“And if you hadn’t, you never would’ve found Tommy.” They turned a corner, and Tommy shrunk further back into the bush, feeling like he was intruding but now interested at the mention of his name. “He would never have gotten the chances he did.”

“I regret the time we lost.” She said honestly. “But I think if I went back, I would make the same choices, for the children and for us. It’s better that we have time now, years later, than we lost it all back then.”

“Deep thoughts for a Sunday afternoon.”

“Deep thoughts for any afternoon.” She added with a laugh. “I thought maybe you were really dead like they said but I couldn’t believe it.”

“That’s both endearing and a little stupid.” He teased her, not unkindly.

“I know.” They were fading away a little bit and he leaned forward to hear them better.

“Boo.” Tommy visibly started, tumbling back into the bush, mouth opening to shriek but Wilbur caught him, covering his mouth with a hand before he could make a sound. “Snooping huh?”

“As if you weren’t fucker.” He picked himself up, dusting himself off aggressively. “Don’t pretend you were out here for nothing.”

“Wasn’t going to.” Wilbur replied cheerfully. “Going to make fun of them being sappy later.”

He held out his arm. Tommy leaned away, expecting to be pulled into a headlock or something but Wilbur just put his arm around his shoulders, guiding him back to the blanket.

The younger boy leaned back into him without really thinking, resting his head on his shoulder as they walked back slowly, watching Tubbo and Ranboo talk quietly, the latter doing most of the talking for once while the former just listened along, nodding his head or interjecting here and there.

“He’s your polar opposite.” Wilbur observed. “Reserved, smart, intuitive....”

“Fuck right off!” That only drew laughter. “Wouldn’t be laughing if I told the Agency Thanatos is currently walking in a park in the middle of the fancy district being a rich sap.”

“I don’t think that would be funny.” He replied, suddenly looking pained.

“Really?” He turned away, starting to grin. “I think it would be fucking hilarious.”

“Please don’t joke about that.”

“I wouldn’t really.” He amended. “At least probably not.” That drew the elder’s attention, leaning over to snatch a sausage roll, sitting himself down on the corner of the blanket.

“Oh? So that’s changed has it. Why now?”

“I mean, I guess I’ve seen what you were hiding from me.” He furrowed his brow, flopping back in the grass. “So...I guess there wasn’t anything left. And seeing as I kind of, you know, planted a bug on the Warden’s office, it feels real now..” The words felt like a death knell, heavy on his tongue.

“You’ve practically been living in one of the most secret hybrid community in the world for several days now.” He said, amused. “When was it not real?”

“Wait there are others?” Tommy asked, confused. Wilbur grinned

“Well if there are they’re so secret we don’t know about them.”

“I mean it was different.” He argued. “Then I could still tell myself I was just here cos I didn’t have anywhere else to go, that I’d been dragged in, or coerced or some shit. Now I’m actively part of it.”

“Is that a problem?”

“I don’t know Will!” He burst out. “I don’t know!” Kristin glanced back, concerned, but he just shook his head, dropping his voice. “I don’t do this, this isn’t what I’m used to.”

“Is it so bad?”

He didn’t answer that. On the one hand, there was Orpheus, quick-witted and cruel, that sly smile flickering across Wilbur’s face for an instant as he spied their parents wandering further and further away, but it didn’t have half the malice without the mask.

Achilles, dark and brutal and cold, and Techno lying on his front, a book in one hand. Thanatos, a shadow, but also loyal, steadfast Phil still standing by his sons years after he lost his wings, under the bough of a tree a little way away leaning on his cane, Kristin talking softly into his ear.

And Kristin herself, a light in her eyes he hadn’t seen in years, the stress falling away from her with every passing day.

He thought back to Niki, bright smile, and bright pink hair, more full of life than he’d ever seen her. He’d grown so used to it he never realised how much she was missing until it all came back, and he hadn’t been there to see it.

To Ranboo, lying on his front in the grass more relaxed than he’d ever been, Tubbo walking him through making a flower crown, one nestled between the budding horns poking through his hair.

“Tommy?” Will prompted.

“I don’t care about the Agency, I’m done.” He didn’t quite know where the words came from, a sudden burst of anger almost at the idyllic scene in front of him, and neither did Wilbur, sitting up rapidly, his eyes flashing with concern.

“I don’t know if you know what you’re getting into. It’s dangerous.”

“I don’t care if it’s dangerous. There’s nothing left for me there.” The rest of the sentence went unspoken, Wilbur’s eyes travelling around, at Ranboo, at Kristin, Phil, Techno, even Tubbo.

“I see. So you’re with us?”

“No. Yes. No. I don’t know.” He sighed, folding his hands in his lap. “I don’t fucking know. I can’t go back to the Agency like before, I never can. I fucking betrayed the Warden, I did that, Ranboo doesn’t count he never liked him in the first place but I did that. I didn’t tell them about you, I can’t do that, I’d feel bad and I don’t even fucking know why I’d feel bad.”

“Aww. You care about us.” Wilbur teased, trying to make light of it, but the smile didn’t quite reach his eyes, something heavier hanging behind.

“Fuck you.”

“I mean, if it’s what you want, I won’t stop you.” He said begrudgingly. “I can’t really actively encourage you because I’d get told off, but I’m not disappointed.”

“Didn’t think you would be.” Tommy muttered. “Somehow.”

“Truce?” Wilbur offered, holding a hand out. He hesitated for a bit, and then took it.

“Truce.”

It felt like the world should have fallen apart with such a statement, with such a shift that felt so alien to him, and he almost waited for it, one hand braced against the floor. But the world kept turning, the sun hung in the same place in the sky, the birds kept singing. It never came

Chapter End Notes

It's hella late but it's here

I'm trying to get better with my writing schedule again, I'm aiming for weekly on sundays at the moment but with all the work for Quill Kingdoms and my finals it's all been thrown up in the air a bit. I'm working on it though I swear

Chapter 57

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

It began to cool towards the evening, Tommy oblivious to everything, lying on his front in the grass plucking a dandelion of its petals absent-mindedly. Tubbo was starting to get nervous, watching every Enforcer that walked past, hands trembling a little.

He leaned over to Ranboo, whispering something and they both got up, signalling to Kristin that they were heading back home. She sat up, waving Tommy over, who got up as slowly as he possibly could, dragging his feet

"What?"

"If you head back with the others now you won't have to carry things." She said, before he could say anything else. "Tubbo's a bit nervous, it'll be better if both of you are with him."

"Wait you're just letting me go." He said suspiciously. "Not even help tidy or anything."

"I mean." She got a sudden, sly look. "If you want to."

"Nope! Got it, I'm outta here." He snatched up his things, flinging his arm around a very startled Ranboo's shoulders. "Let's go Ranboob."

The older boy didn't even comment at the name, leading the way toward the gate. Tubbo pulled his hood up as they passed the Enforcers just in case, Tommy walking in front of him to hide him from view. The Enforcers didn't even look twice, but they kept at it anyway, an unspoken tension all the way onto the quiet streets that morphed into an awkward silence as they wound their way back down through the houses.

"Well. Did you have fun?" Tommy asked at last, a little stiffly

"It was normal." Tubbo replied.

He pulled a face. "Oh well if it's just normal what does it matter then."

"No, normal is good." He explained, struggling a little for the right words. "Normal is nice. New."

"Oh." He felt a shred of sympathy for the hybrid boy. Tubbo looked more upbeat now they were out of sight of the Enforcers, a light coming back into his face. The dandelion crown he'd made for himself looked a bit wilted from the sun but he wore it proudly, hanging a little lopsided off his horns. "I want to do more things like this." He confided in them, lowering his voice. "Now that I can."

"It's still dangerous." Ranboo reminded him. "I'm surprised Phil let us."

"How did you even do that?" Tommy asked

“I just kind of turned up with him and said he’s staying.” Ranboo admitted, going a little red. “I didn’t think it would work.”

“I think it was kind of stupid.” Tommy told them both bluntly

“Probably.” Tubbo agreed. “But it was fun. I just wanted to be normal for a bit, you know?”

“Don’t we all.” That drew an almost humourless laugh out of the other two, a kind of mutual understanding running between all of them.

They parted without many words when they got back to the house, Ranboo and Tubbo disappearing out into the garden, Tommy dragging himself up the stairs. He set himself up on his bed, playing an old documentary on his laptop, headphones in to drown out the low hum of their voices from outside his window.

It was one he used to watch all the time, Archangel front and centre, a younger, less armoured Warden, Scar before he turned to a villain, laughing and joking with Grian, another avian hybrid, with wings like a scarlet macaw. Impulse, Gemini, faces he recognised so well.

It was bittersweet somehow, something which had once bought him so much nostalgia. He couldn’t quite level the two, the young man on his screen with beautiful black wings, catching the sun with a kind of iridescence that almost turned a deep purple color, hair tied back, confident and athletic.

And yet, looking closer the stance was the same, shoulders back and proud but the fire in Archangel had become a cold steel in Phil, he walked a little more unsteadily now, as if even after all these years he hadn’t learned to balance without his wings. The quick wit had turned quieter, carefully guarded now, but it was there, if you knew where to look.

The Warden said something to a reporter and Archangel laughed, a fully belly laugh, infectious, causing a few of the others around him to chuckle, Gemini covering a smile with a hand. Some of the reporters eyed him suspiciously, the animosity was there, the fear, it didn’t shy from showing the angry crowds or the graffiti on the walls, but he wasn’t watching any of that, focusing on Phil.

“Tommy?” He started, tearing his headphones out.

“What?” Kristin poked her head around the door, waving to him.

“Hey, can I come in?”

“Sure.” He moved aside, making space for her on the bed, shoving a pile of blankets out of the way. She sat down a little stiffly, brushing a piece of grass off her dress.

“So, you know, you’re seventeen soon…” She began

“Huh?” He looked up, confused. “Wait what?”

“In two weeks. Did you forget?”

His jaw hung open for a moment, and then he scrambled for his phone to confirm it. A flicker of guilt crossed her face but he didn’t see it. “I’m sorry, you always remember.” He stared at his calendar for a

few seconds, before setting it down again

“Oh.”

“Time flies.” He slumped back against the wall.

“Just had a lot going on I guess.”

She took his hand, “I know it’s been a lot, but one day this will all be over, and we can go with Phil and the…”

“Is Phil in this?” He interrupted. She turned to look at him a little more, curious

“What do you mean?”

“Is Phil really in this? Not like, are you two a thing, like is he going to be in this, when this is all over.”

“What are you trying to say?” She asked, confused

“That I don’t see how we get out of here without getting caught.” He grabbed his pillow and wrapped his arms around it for a kind of comfort, dragging his knees up to his chest. “If they go down we’re dead too.” He pulled the pillow closer, a cold feeling crawling across his skin. “Fuck whatever Wilbur does to make them think we did nothing wrong, they wouldn’t even care if we’re innocent if we got caught. They’d want someone to blame.”

“I’ll do whatever it takes to protect you.” She said without hesitation. “And the others would do. You know that don’t you.”

“Is that going to be enough?” He stared at the screen, at the hero stood on it, frozen mid-speech. “Why didn’t you leave? You and Phil and them two. You could have left with them years ago.”

“We needed to split, it wasn’t safe.” She explained. “Try and pull them in two directions so they would stand a chance.”

“How did you not get caught?”

“Wilbur left a compulsion on me, made them think I was an innocent victim.” He nodded along, the words going through his head but not really registering for a few moments. Then a kind of horror dawned across him. “Wait. You knew he could do that.”

“I did.” She looked a little bewildered, not knowing where he was going with it.

“You knew, all this time, that the boys you freed were, were the Syndicate?” She didn’t need to answer, he could see it written all over her face. “You knew this whole time.” He said disbelievably

“There was…A high chance.” She said finally. “But I couldn’t talk about it, Wilbur made sure of that, and even if I could, I wouldn’t have.”

“You watched them do all this, knowing who they were.” He accused. “You watched me come home after fights and you knew!”

“I did everything I could, what more could I do.” She squeezed his hand gently in a kind of reassurance. “I didn’t know them, I couldn’t say anything, I couldn’t stop them from taking you away to that job, there was nothing more I could do than pray that Phil was there, and had raised them well and knew what he was doing, and everything I heard confirmed that.”

“Confirmed what?”

“That the Syndicate weren’t who the authorities said they were. They told you a lot of stories on TV but I think we both knew they kept plenty back.”

“I thought we discovered Thanatos.” He said dryly. “Me and Ranboo. I was so confident we’d stumbled across something huge and then Tubbo just knew about Thanatos too.”

“They led you on, and lied to you, it’s not right.” She sighed. “This is all beside the point. At the end of the day, I had unfinished business, and Phil, Phil did too, as much as he didn’t want to admit it, and I’m glad it turned out the way it did or I’d never have found you.”

“Fucking sap.” Was all Tommy managed to come up with.

“It is what it is, we just have to make the best of it, and that’s what I’m trying to do. I can’t protect you anymore Tommy, I know that, I can’t, and the Agency won’t, but they will, Wilbur will, Techno will. That’s what matters to me, that’s why I’m doing all of this, that’s why we’re here. You can call me a sap if you want, but you’d do the same if you had a son. You’d do anything.”

Maybe it was just weariness, or the gentle understanding on her face, or something else, but Tommy just slumped forward, falling against her shoulder like he’d done since he was a kid. Kristin pulled him into a tight hug, He buried his head in her shoulder, just letting himself rest there for a few minutes.

“You’re safe here, I promise.”

He didn’t reply, but he didn’t really feel like disagreeing either. There was a few minutes of silence, just enjoying each other’s company.

“We’ve got to stop doing this.” She teased. “I just came in here to ask what you wanted to do for your birthday and here we are again, in a deep conversation.”

“Waffles.” He muttered. “Just waffles.”

“I had a feeling. Anything else?”

“No.”

“Are you sure?” She coaxed. “We have time now, I don’t have to work, we could go somewhere? A theme park? The cinema?”

“Waffles. And throw Wilbur into a lake.” That drew a warm laugh out of her, and she hugged him a little tighter.

“I’ll see what I can do.”

“Yeahhh. Best mum.” He drawled. “It’ll be funny.”

“If you say so.” She looked around sceptically at the mess on the floor, clothes tossed across the carpet, his bag discarded by the bathroom door half unpacked. “Mind if I..?” He nodded and she let go of him, getting to her feet a little unsteadily, having to grab the bedframe.

Tommy sat up, closing his laptop as she began clearing a few things from his floor, tossing them into his laundry basket. She picked up the bag of clothes Wilbur had given him, which was dumped by the arm chair. “I don’t recognise these?”

“Clothes Wilbur got me ages ago. Took ‘em with me to Ranboo’s on the night of the fire.” He muttered. She pulled out a sweater, unfolding it curiously. Something tumbled out, and she caught it, unravelling it to reveal an obnoxiously patterned Hawaiian shirt, covered with sunflowers.

“Oh?” Tommy scowled deeply.

“I fucking hate him.” He complained. Kristin nodded slowly, staring at it. “He’s laughing at me I know he is. Bet he was mad I didn’t see it sooner.” He threw the pillow he’d been holding aside in contempt, slumping back against the wall.

“How did he know?” She turned it over in her hands, transfixed by it somehow, but seeming to stare past it.

“Know what? The nickname.” She didn’t answer. “He probably didn’t and thought it was just ugly. Also pretty sure you called me that in the diner and he laughed at me. I hate him, he’s ugly, he’s shit.”

“That makes sense.” The smile didn’t quite reach her eyes though. She looked oddly distracted as she folded it slowly, setting it back down. “Well, that was nice of Wilbur. And lucky you took it with you.”

“Barely looked at them.” He plucked the t-shirt he was wearing, “Just this.”

“We need to get you more clothes.” She decided. “We’re going shopping some time,”

“I hate...”

“Shopping, I know, but you need to.” She stopped, hovering by the door. “Oh and before I forget, Techno said they’re going to Haven in a minute. Are you coming?”

“Sure.”

She shut the door quietly behind her, still looking unsettled. Tommy snatched his discarded hoodie up, dragging it on and clattering down the stairs. Wilbur was pacing around the living room, spinning a

keychain around his finger. His atlas was open on the table, a magnifying glass lying next to it, and some scattered notes.

"It's my birthday soon." Tommy declared the moment he stepped inside.

"I know." Wilbur replied.

"You know?" He said, surprised. "How come you know, I forgot?"

He looked thoughtful. "Kristin told me?" He ran his hand across the top of the mantelpiece, frowning at the layer of dust that clung to his fingertips. "Need to do something about that, keep forgetting to vacuum."

"You don't forget!" Kristin called over. "You keep finding something else to do the moment I ask you."

"Shut up mum and stop listening in!"

There was a sigh from the kitchen. "Wilbur." He lit up with the most angelic smile like butter wouldn't melt on his mouth, tilting his head to hear her better.

"What is it?"

"Stop that. You know what you're doing."

"No idea what you're talking about." He spun on his heel dramatically, turning back to Tommy.

"I'm surprised you kept that one alive." Phil walked in, pulling on his coat, Techno trailing behind him. "He's terrible." He explained to Tommy. "Destroys every book in sight, Techno's had to salvage a few of them." Techno nodded in silent agreement. "Breaks the spine, tears the pages, drops them in water, we don't know how he does it."

"They're not destroyed." He said indignantly. "I prefer, well loved."

"Do you not love that one then." Tommy mocked him. "

"Oh no, this one's loved too." Wilbur scooped it up, clutching it to his chest. "But it's different."

"So what are we doing?" Tommy interrupted. "Why are we going?"

"We need to talk about what we heard on the recording." Will dropped his voice automatically, looking around as if they weren't in the safety of his own home right now. Just the mention of it brought an old wariness back to his eyes. "We need to do something."

"Niki's meeting us there, Aimsey bought her over earlier." Tommy looked around the lounge suddenly, spotting a missing member

"Wait what happened to Tubbo? He was just here,"

"I dropped him off home earlier. He can't exactly hear this stuff." Ranboo joined them.

“And I can?” He asked curiously.

“If you want to.” Wilbur said, a little hopeful. “I’d like you to be here.”

“But not Tubbo.”

“Well, no. He’s the president’s son.”

Tommy flopped down on the sofa. “Aaaand I’m a hero.”

“Are you?”

“Ay fuck you bitch.” He said it lightly, but as joking as Wilbur’s comment was it felt personal. He bit back the response though, staring at the fabric of the sofa, picking at a loose thread.

“Tommy?” Ranboo prompted, holding out a hand. “You coming?”

“Sure.” He grabbed the offered hand, standing up. One moment they were in the warmth of the lounge, the next they were back in the storm drain the brothers had showed him a few days before, the hatch up to the Syndicate centre above him. Ranboo clambered up the ladder, pushing the hatch aside and reaching down to help Wilbur up. Tommy moved towards them, still feeling unsettled. A pang of unease struck, tightening across his chest. He hesitated, taking a step back, eying the door. Wilbur turned, realising he wasn’t following.

“Tommy?”

“You can stay out here.” Phil offered before he could come up with an excuse or an explanation or something. “You don’t have to join us if you don’t want to.”

“I can’t do this.” It didn’t come out as much more than a whisper.

“It’s okay.” He said kindly. “I understand.” Tommy rolled his eyes before he could catch himself, but the older man didn’t seem to mind. “Fine. I understand that it feels like a betrayal of the people you knew, the friends you made, like you’re turning your back on people who had yours, even after they’ve hurt you. I do Tommy. I get it, it was a long time ago but I still get it now.”

His protests died on his lips in the face of that, completely caught off guard by how heartfelt it was. He just nodded instead, eying him warily. “You’re not mad?”

“Of course not.”

“I can stay with you,” Niki volunteered. She stepped away from the ladder, heading over to him. “Wilbur can fill me in later.”

“We could do with someone with inside knowledge of the Agency.” Phil said quickly, but she just dismissed him with a wave of her hand

“You survived without me long enough. You’ll manage.”

The hatch slammed shut, the sound echoing down into the darkness. Tommy shivered. “I shouldn’t have come.”

"It's alright." She said reassuringly. "They don't mind."

"What do I do?" His voice echoed down the tunnels, disappearing into the distance. "I thought I'd be fine." Niki sighed.

"I don't know."

"I couldn't do it. I was going to but then I just couldn't, I felt bad." She said nothing, waiting for him to continue. "What do you think?"

"Well, it wasn't that many months ago that you wouldn't have hesitated. I had to hold you back from running out there and taking the Syndicate on all by yourself." She pointed out. "It's alright to feel unsure."

"Did you know he was Phil? Archangel, I mean?" He said finally. She went very still, as if she hadn't heard him right, and was waiting for him to correct himself, or something. "Did you?"

"That...doesn't surprise me." She said slowly. "I had a feeling." A silence hung in the air for a few seconds, and then she began to laugh of all things, a light, soft laugh that seemed so at odds with the cold and concrete around them. "He went from Philza to Phil, how did he get away with it?" She said admiringly. "I knew he was brave but that's almost stupid."

"Wilbur said he helped."

"Ah." She was smiling still. "Well, if anyone could, it would be him." Tommy's curiosity peaked, and he moved a little closer.

"You never talked about him when I bought it up." He prompted. "Why not?"

"You've asked me this a million times."

"And you never answered."

"I don't know, it was a bit of a touchy subject, we were very fond of him." She looked distant, a thousand-yard stare aimed somewhere down into the darkness. "Puffy was devastated when we lost him, she was promoted immediately to a full hero, she never got time to really process it, or time to finish her apprenticeship, I was barely in training." She twisted the fabric of her sleeve around her fingers, once, twice, watching it carefully. "You would have liked him. You were very similar."

"Why the fuck does everyone think we're similar."

"You would have loved to hear that once." She sounded bittersweet now. "You adored him."

Tommy rested his head on his hands, staring down at the trickle of water at the base of the drain. "Archangel just wasn't the person I thought he was."

"No?" She raised an eyebrow. "Why?"

Tommy stared at her and then waved his arm in the direction of the door. "I don't know, maybe because he's the head of the Syndicate, or something? Why the fuck do you think?"

“If what you just told me is true, he sacrificed everything to save them.” She said simply. “He chose to do what was right, to protect people who couldn’t protect themselves, he put his own life on the line to defend what he believed in. Isn’t that the one you knew?”

“I-.” She reached out, settling a hand on his shoulder.

“You know it’s not that simple, don’t you.” She got a somewhat half-hearted shrug in return. “We’re people Tommy. We’re not heroes, we’re not villains, Archangel wasn’t, I wasn’t, you know better than that.”

“No you were a hero.” He insisted immediately.

“Then why am I here?” She spread her arms to take in their surroundings. “Hiding away in an old storm drain.”

“Because Wilbur shot you.”

“Because Ranboo told him they had a target on my head.” She replied, just as fast. “Because they came to help me, before I was actually killed. What kind of nation treats it’s heroes like that.”

“I’m not much of a hero anymore. I sold out Sam, I helped the Syndicate, I’m fucking living with them.” He said, frustrated. “I don’t even know if I can call myself that.”

“Ranboo told me about what happened at the gun bust.” She said bluntly. “You got yourself shot to save him.”

“I was fine.” He said quickly, his hand straying unconsciously to the site of the wound. “Supreme was there really fast.”

“Ponk or no Ponk it doesn’t change what you did, what you were willing to do. Doesn’t make it right that it happened to you either.”

He dragged his fingers over the stone, tracing a design in the dirt absent mindedly. “Why did you stay?”

“I mean, I’m dead, I couldn’t go, even if they offered.” She wrapped her arms around herself, shivering a little as a slight draft passed them, bringing cold air from deeper in the drains.

“You could have escaped across the border.” Tommy reasoned. “The Enforcers wouldn’t be looking for you, and you’re powerful, you could have made it. Why didn’t you think of that?”

That made her hesitate, thinking her answer over. When she finally responded it was a little drawn out, as if she was debating whether to answer at all. “I mean, I did. But it wouldn’t have been safe, if they worked out who I was they’re legally required to send me back.” She said solemnly. “I couldn’t show my face, ever. If I was caught, they’d send me back here to die as a deserter or something, they’ll treat me just the same as any soldier that ran away. It’s safer here.”

“Without the sun? You could have gone to the sea. You said you wanted to.”

She pushed a stray strand of hair behind her ear. "It's complicated Tommy."

"You could have been free. I don't see what's complicated."

"Look." She turned to him. "If it took you dying to free metas, would the Warden hesitate?" Tommy stared at her.

"Wha-. What kind of question is that?"

"Would he? Answer me."

"No." He said slowly. "Of course he wouldn't."

There was a spark in her eyes, a kind he was familiar with, a sense of pride when he got a question right. He used to chase that spark, feel such pride in it, but now he was just confused. "That's it. You don't even question why it would ever need your life." She told him. "It shouldn't take anyone's life to do that, and yet a whole generation of heroes are dead. And we were next, something has gone horribly wrong and I can't just turn my back on that. I can't make it someone else's problem, I don't think you can either."

"You would be the first person to tell me to go if I got the chance." That drew a wry smile.

"I would. But I'd also know that it's you and you'd refuse. It's a part of me now, just like it's a part of you. I have to stay and see this through, for better for worse, if it survives or falls I'll be there, and I know you will too, whatever side you choose."

"We could die." He tried to reason with her, but he didn't even really know what he was arguing for anymore, or if it even made sense. "You could die, you really want to risk that?"

"We're both on borrowed time Tommy, we were condemned from the start. I knew it the moment I took you on that one of us would see the other's grave sooner rather than later." She said sadly, a kind of honest acceptance in her voice that made it all the more heart-breaking. "Death came for both of us, Persephone came for me and Thanatos for you. Like it or not they have us now."

"I don't want this." He pressed his back into the wall as if it would offer some support, or comfort right now. "I didn't want any of this."

"You can't put this off forever. It might be easier to just hang in the middle but you know you're not being honest to yourself." She said, not unkind, but firm. "You can't have both."

"It's not fair." It sounded weak even to him, but she didn't point that out

"I know."

"And what's in it for you? Other than bringing down the Agency? What do we do after that?"

"I don't know. All I know is that I'm a dead woman Tommy. I have nothing and everything to gain." She said simply. "And there is something very freeing about not being afraid anymore."

She reached her hand out towards the trickle winding it's way across the concrete floor. The water stretched up into the air, trailing into droplets, and she wound it around her hand, little bracelets forming. "Do you even know the last time I did that without a mask on?"

It was a rhetorical question, but he shook his head anyway, unsure of what else to do. "Every conversation we have these days is hard." She continued. "It's hard seeing you so unsure of yourself. I miss talking about silly things and whatever your brain would come up with. I miss your confidence,"

"Fine." Tommy reached out towards some of the debris on the floor, looking around nervously as if someone would just come running out of the drain to catch them. The pebbles rose into the air, hovering there for a few seconds. "Happy?" They clattered to the ground again.

"You let go."

"It feels weird out of uniform." He mumbled. He slid down against the wall, tossing the other stones aside. She knelt down in front of him so she could look him in the eyes, like she had whenever things had gone wrong, whenever training wasn't going well, whenever he felt tired or down.

"Take a risk." She said gently. "Take back the old Tommy they took from you, you don't have to be afraid anymore."

"I don't know how." He complained.

"I didn't either. But I'm here now. We all are, we'll work this out." That reassurance bolstered him a little. She held out her hand and he took it, pulling himself to his feet.

"What about Purpled, and Spark. They don't know. What will happen to them?"

"Give them credit." She suggested. "Purpled's much smarter than you think he is."

"It's not their fault."

"No, it's not." She agreed. "And no one thinks it is. We're bringing down the institution, not the people."

"Do they agree?" He gestured towards the hatch.

"Tommy they're sheltering the son of the very man who caused all of this for us." She said wryly. "They took in the president's son, and didn't harm a hair on his head, or question his right to be here once they knew. You can trust them."

"I know." And he did. For all he wanted to hate them, for everything he'd learned, and everything he'd been, he couldn't bring himself to believe anything else, as much as he wanted to.

"Do you care about them?" She pressed.

"Yes." He didn't hesitate that time. "I do. But if you tell Wilbur that you're dead to me."

"Understood." She said wryly. "You know they care about you too? If you're honest?"

"I. I think so yes." That proud look came back and he pushed her away, grumbling.

"Fuck you, I don't like you." She patted him on the shoulder.

"You do that." He pulled a face but he was smiling. "You'll always be my student, no matter what." She told him. "There or here, you still have a lot to learn but you can do this, I know you can, and I'll be here every step of the way." She sounded genuinely optimistic and he couldn't help but reflect that, standing up a little straighter. "So, what are you doing?"

He took a deep breath, before pushing the hatch up, slipping in quietly. Phil noted their entrance with a slight turn of his head and a nod, before moving his focus back to Wilbur, who was pacing back and forth in front of the computers on the right of the room, the recording pulled up on the screen, mid-argument, hands in the air.

It sounded like they'd been disagreeing over something for a while, Techno standing to the back, his arms folded.

"-matters right now is that there is someone with the power to destabilise both Schlatt and the Agency, and the information as to who that person is, is in that vault. Why is this a debate?"

"We don't even know if it's still there." Kristin said calmly. "We've said this. It's not worth the risk."

"And I'm trying to say that it is, this is exactly what we've been waiting for!" Wilbur pushed a chair aside to give himself more room to pace. "We literally have him on tape, both of them, telling us where to find everything to destroy them and you just want to walk away from that?"

"We can't take..."

"Unnecessary risks, I know, but this is a necessary risk. I mean, what do you want to do about this, if this doesn't justify a Syndicate response what does."

"If the Warden's been sent after whoever Schlatt wants gone, they'll either end up in Pandora or dead." Techno added.

"Exactly!" Wilbur gestured towards his brother. "He gets it. If we don't act there's blood on our hands."

"The actions of a dictator are not our fault." Phil reminded him. "We can only do so much."

He sounded so weary, the words of a man who'd had to watch too much, unable to help without losing everything. Wilbur was impulsive, bursting with ideas, Techno was quieter, reasoning it out with blunt logic, and Phil lent them years of experience, etched in lines that had aged him too early.

The Syndicate, and yet not. Every time Tommy looked, they grew a little more human, despite everything. From Wilbur's grief to a confession seconds long about the root of the power suppressors,

and what he could only infer had happened to Techno for them to be created, it made more and more sense

"We don't even know if they're still there." Niki chimed in. "They're right, there's too many unknown's right now."

"If it lines up with the past any information won't be removed from that safe by the Warden" Phil's brow was furrowed, looking thoughtful. "So that's not an issue, but everything else, the security system, whether Schlatt's men have already taken it back or destroyed it, let alone how to even get into the vaults, we don't know, we can't even begin to plan that kind of thing."

Ranboo sat up immediately. "No, still no." Techno cut him off firmly. "We might have to consider a full scale attack, security systems are no use if you don't have a wall."

"We can't risk that." Phil disagreed. "Schlatt is desperately unstable, one wrong move and he'll use it to fuel god knows what. If it wasn't so dangerous I'd say we send Lethe." He aimed that towards Ranboo. "But I don't think that's possible."

"Ranboo's used to infiltrating offices and warehouses, not a whole bank." Wilbur agreed. "We can't expect him to do that on his own. He can't even teleport."

"Wait what?" Tommy looked back and forth between them, startled out of his train of thought, confused. "Is something wrong?"

"No, it would just blow my cover." Ranboo explained. "I can barely use my powers as Lethe unless I can pass them off as something else. But I can do it,, I stole some documents from there before."

"Can I help?" The words were out of his mouth before he really realised what he was saying. All eyes in the room turned to him, and he pressed his hand to his chest, the guilt returning like a band across his ribs. He turned to Kristin for reassurance, almost expecting to see disappointment instead, but all he saw was a kind of understanding.

"I can help." He asserted into the sudden silence that had fallen, not sure who he was trying to convince. Techno frowned slightly, looking thoughtful, not dismissive but wary at the very least.

"You?"

"What the fuck's that supposed to mean?" He leapt straight to his own defence, staring the older man down. Techno stared back, completely unphased.

"It means, that you haven't decided if you're with us or going to hand us in."

"I don't know, I just want to help." He said, frustrated. "I don't know what I'm doing, but I'm sick of standing around."

"Tommy you..."

"Tommy's had my back for months," Ranboo said quietly. "And I've got his. We make a good team."

"I don't doubt that." Phil intervened before it could escalate into any kind of argument. "But what would you want to do?" Tommy shrugged helplessly, his sudden burst of confidence evaporating as quickly as it came with all the eyes on him now.

"We've broken into places before, it went well." Ranboo said hesitantly. "He could..."

"As I remember that ended in him getting shot." Kristin reminded them. "I wouldn't class that as going well."

"I think it went great." Tommy said cheerfully.

"Please don't tell me you're suggesting I send the two children here out on the most dangerous job we've done yet, if we even go ahead with this." Phil said, a little pained. "As much as I understand you're both very skilled for your age, morally it feels very wrong."

"There's still the option of the party." Kristin added, flicking through some notes. "That's the best we have so far." Techno hummed in agreement

"Party?"

Phil waved his hand. "Some invite to a grand opening of some refurbishment of an old building, they sent out a generic invite to anyone who's anyone in the city, but it's dangerous to do anything at a public gathering."

"That didn't stop you at the Sponsors Ball." Tommy shot back.

"We had time to plan then," He explained calmly, unbothered by the slight edge to the boy's tone. "Measure risk and reward and have everything in place, we have two weeks."

"We can start from there though." Kristin suggested. "I can get the details of this party and then we can make a plan, it'll be an excellent alibi. And I need to speak to Tommy about...things before we go any further." A slight guilty expression flashed across his face.

"Alright. Ranboo, it's a last resort only." Phil informed him, before motioning for Techno to come over to join him. The meeting broke apart just like that, forming into little groups at a wave of his hand. Tommy reeled back, staring at his hands.

"What the hell was that?" Ranboo grabbed his arm. "Tommy?"

"A mistake, probably." He breathed. "I don't know."

"You for real? You want to help?" He was grinning all of a sudden.

"I don't know what I want Ranboob. I don't know." Tommy said tiredly. "But I'm pretty fucking tired of not knowing."

He turned away before he could ask anything else, looking across the room for the approval he needed. Niki gave him a soft smile, inclining her head in acknowledgment, and he relaxed a little. The butterflies settled into something else, something strange, a little like triumph. He strode over to her, feeling a sudden heady elation at what he'd done, heart racing.

“That wasn’t what I expected.” Niki teased as he came up to her, Kristin sat next to her, Phil off in the corner talking to Techno.

“Hey you were the one that told me to be impulsive.” She held up a hand to cut him off before he could get too defensive

“I did. But that wasn’t what I meant, you don’t have to do this right now, you don’t have to prove anything.”

“It’s a bit late for me now.” He said bleakly. “I already helped. I’m in this now.”

“I’m so proud of you,” Kristin said softly. “I wish you wouldn’t do this, but I’m still proud. But please tell me before you do something like that.”

“In my defence, it was Niki’s fault.” She might have replied but Wilbur barged past, dragging him into a tight hug

"Tommy!"

"If you say anything you die." Tommy threatened, but the effect was slightly removed by the fact his face was squashed into Will's shoulder.

"I knew you'd come around. I told Niki, I told her you would."

"I haven't 'come around'. It's a trial period." He corrected. "I'm just going to see, I don't even know what I'm doing yet, I'm just bored."

He just laughed at that, with a kind of knowing arrogance. "If you say so."

"I don't like you."

"The feeling is not mutual." Wilbur dropped his voice, leaning in to whisper in his ear. "Welcome to the team, Atlas."

Chapter End Notes

Family fluff was requested, and so I have delivered, and Tommy's finally chosen a side. I'm sure there will be no lasting consequences of this action

Atlas at last

Chapter Notes

Hello, it's me, I'm back, and I hit 2k on twitter so I had to finally update. Also I fixed the discord link, it's been broken for a bit because I only set it to 100 people never imagining I'd get more so I'm so sorry about that but a working one will be in the end notes

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

“Atlas.” Tommy said flatly. “Fuckin’ Atlas.”

Wibur grinned, “Well. We didn’t know you were Theseus when we first came up with it and we needed something. You got a problem with it?”

“So you could talk about me behind my back.”

“Actually, so we could talk about you in front of you.” He said cheerfully. “Without you taking it personally.”

“That’s worse!”

He shrugged, sobering a little. “Well, if you want the serious answer we didn’t want to worry you. I guess.”

“Bit late.” Tommy pointed out, scowling. Wilbur accepted this with a slight nod, and then flung himself down on a chair.

“So, now you’re with us...”

“Will.” Techno cut him off firmly, “Don’t even start.”

“I’m not...with you. I just, I don’t know. I can’t just sit here and do nothing.” Tommy said tiredly.

“Niki told me to, blame it on Niki.”

“Niki you’re the best!” Wilbur yelled over. She looked up, surprised, and then took in Tommy’s pained expression, shaking her head and turning back to Kristin. “Alright, so you’re not about to murder us, is that better?”

Tommy gave him a withering stare, drawing a slight laugh out of Ranboo. “I wouldn’t be so sure about that one either.”

“See, Ranboo gets me.” Ranboo nodded sagely

“So true. I have no idea what’s going on.” That got him a slap across the arm which he duly ignored.

The conversation stalled and they stood staring at each other for a few moments.

“So. What now?” Tommy asked uneasily

“We need more information.” Techno unfolded his arms, looking over at Wilbur. “What have we got?”

“We need to get hold of the bank access keys and codes, we’re not going anywhere without those.” Wilbur sat himself down at a computer, getting a confused look

“You can...do that? With just the three of...” Tommy stalled for a second, glancing at Ranboo. “Four of you?” There was a slight hush and he groaned. “What the fuck did I say now.” Techno looked like he was about to say something, and then bit his tongue, catching Phil’s eye for help.

“There’s no point.” Kristin answered instead. “It’s a bit late now to hide it.” She shared a look with Phil, Tommy turning his head between them in confusion.

“Am I missing something?”

“We’ve been trying to keep him safe,” Phil replied. “I’m not sure if...”

“I pity the person who takes it on themselves to make Tommy talk when he doesn’t want to.” She said airily. “And again, it’s too late. We can’t fool ourselves about protecting him by hiding things anymore.”

“What does that mean?”

“Oh Tommy. You didn’t really think it was just us, did you?” Wilbur flopped down on a chair, kicking his feet up on the desk. “You didn’t think we didn’t have informants? Contacts? Supporters?” He looked back blankly

“I mean I know about Haven but there’s...more?”

“We’re the *leaders* of the syndicate.” Wilbur declared, wearing a smug grin “Not just the Syndicate, we’re the heads of it all, it runs a lot deeper than you probably think.”

“How many...”

“A few.” Techno cut in again before Wilbur could get carried away “But with every person who knows about it, it’s another person who can tell our secret.” He gave his brother a pointed look. “What he’s is trying to say is that we have ways of getting information, and friends in high places.”

“And enemies in high places.” Phil added.

“Isn’t that dangerous? How do you know people won’t tell?” Tommy slid down into a chair, feeling a little light-headed

“We don’t.” He said grimly. “We can vet them, if we don’t feel safe Will can compel them, but other than that we can just be careful.”

“Haven’s location is only known to a handful of people, let alone it’s existence,” Wilbur said. “I make sure of that. Sniff doesn’t know about the Syndicate stuff, so if Haven is compromised we aren’t, we keep it all separate as much as we can.”

Tommy tried to speak but his mouth was suddenly dry. A kind of calculating look had entered Phil’s expression and Wilbur was the same, Techno alert, leaning forward to listen in. Suddenly the masks felt less like accessories and more like something he was watching happen right in front of him. “And what happens if it goes wrong?” He managed

“Wouldn’t be the first time. We deal with it.”

“Deal...with it.”

“Not like that.” Phil intervened, noticing the younger’s slightly pale expression. “We don’t do that. Worst comes to worst, we have to alter their memories, and then they go.”

“I mean a trail of bodies is more suspicious but also trying to avoid killing,” Techno said, oddly nonchalant. “But that’s besides the point. We need our contacts.”

“How do you think one architect gets invited to the president’s home, gets given two of the most important jobs the city’s had in months, gets invited to every grand social event in the city.” Phil took a sip from a glass of water, setting it down beside him. “Haven doesn’t happen through one rich man and his sons. We have people who smuggle us groceries, building supplies, people like Sniff, who used to work on the surface before they had to go below for their own safety, we have people in the Agency, in the meta facilities.”

“The porter who let us into City Hall the night before to place the bomb.” Wilbur continued. “The warehouse on the city edge that loses some of its supplies to alleged damage each month and has to send them away, and somewhere along the way they fall into Haven’s hands, the office workers in city hall that change the records, write the death certificates. We know what we’re doing, and they don’t.”

“You raised an army.” Tommy whispered.

Phil shrugged, a slight smile tugging at his mouth. “It happens.”

There were a few moments of silence, his breath oddly loud in the still air. Eyes prickled against his skin, the Syndicate watching for his reaction, Techno intrigued, Niki and Kristin sympathetic, Wilbur still with a hint of his arrogant smirk, and Phil, his expression impossible to read.

“And you don’t...I don’t know. Think there’s anything wrong with that?”

“We said we were going to overthrow Schlatt, and we will.” He promised. “And that takes nothing less than an army, we only did what we had to, and at least our people had a choice.” He turned away, signalling the end of that discussion, and Tommy leaned back, reeling a little. He waited until the older man had walked a little out of earshot and then turned to the brothers slowly.

“Is he always like that?”

“No.” Wilbur said firmly. “Not at all, but then we all get a bit like that sometimes.”

“Don’t underestimate him.” Techno said quietly. “He may not have his wings anymore but he has his mind.”

“Dunno.” Tommy scuffed his foot against the carpet. “Seems like he’s lost his mind to me.”

“Has he? It worked.” Niki “In the last few months we’ve grown more than we ever have.”

“The city is restless.” Techno leaned forward. “And in the midst of chaos...”

“There is also opportunity.” Wilbur finished. “What he said. Want to see something?”

“If I said no, would you listen?”

“I’ll stay here thanks.” He settled back, closing his eyes just to rub it in. Hands grabbed the back of his chair, pushing him forward and he yelped in surprise, looking up to see Wilbur grinning down at him.

“Don’t worry, I got you.”

“That’s a reason to be worried dickhead!”

He opened a door at the back, sliding Tommy through into a large dark room. The lights flickered on a little reluctantly, revealing a decent sized space covered with some slightly torn mats. It looked like a garage or something, shelves around the sides stacked with all kinds of odds and ends, the far end dedicated to a pile of slightly worn gym equipment and stacked storage boxes.

“Old electrics room. We stripped it out, use it as a training room now.” Wilbur explained. Tommy picked up one of the hard drives, turning it over in his hand. “If someone found this place they could destroy you.”

“If someone found this place it’s already too late for us, so it doesn’t matter what evidence we leave lying around.” Wilbur tossed over his shoulder, “But that’s not what we’re here for.” He gave the chair a push, sending him flying along the edge of the room, the wheels loud against the stone floor, echoing off the walls.

Orpheus stared back at him, a mask and a coat on a mannequin, though it took him a second to realise that.

“You’ll scare him like that.” Techno chided. Wilbur had already moved on, flinging the other door open to reveal an empty mannequin, Achilles’s gear flung on the floor in a heap, the mask tossed on top, casually discarded, so normal and yet so strangely out of place.

“Look at this.” Will grabbed the Orpheus gear so Tommy could see it better. “It’s designed so we can take it on and off quickly.” He explained. “We’ve upgraded over the years, used to just be a black hoodie and some rip off mask I found in a costume shop.” He took the mask, turning it over slowly. “Made of a lot tougher material now.”

Tommy leaned closer, intrigued despite himself. “That’s really it?”

“Yup. Techno is hard to hide, but for me the trenchcoat throws people off, makes it harder to guess weight and height and other giveaways, mask, it’s obvious, earpiece.” He tapped his pocket, taking one out. “Switchblade, it’s useful, not intended for stabbing people but in a pinch I could.”

“So you just look fancy and say things and that’s it.”

Techno snatched up a knife up from the workbench and before anyone could stop him, drove it against the fabric of the vest on Orpheus’s stand. Tommy yelled reflexively but it slid off without much of a mark “Stabproof vest. Bullet proof would slow us down but it helps in close combat. It’s not just for the looks.”

“Wouldn’t bulletproof be safer?”

“Close range.” He pointed at himself. “Long range.” He pointed at Wilbur. “My powers work nearby whereas his has distance so he can stay reasonably out of range, if someone gets close enough to him and he hasn’t compelled them to stop we’re already done for.”

“So. No armour?”

“Not much no. Only what Phil made me wear.” Wilbur confirmed. “The knife was him as well. Didn’t want to see us run off into the world without a very tiny knife that would definitely save me in a life or death situation.” The sarcasm was almost dripping off his tongue

“You know it’s not just you who has to save the world or whatever.” Tommy said, not looking at either of them. “There’s clearly other people who don’t like this.” He picked up a wooden sword, giving it a few practice swishes, ignoring Techno’s somewhat pained expression.

“Like who?” Wilbur asked.

“I don’t know. The riots. The Agency, I mean someone leaked that Enforcer video, the fire one.”

“They weren’t supposed to have cameras on that night.” Techno reached over, correcting his grip so casually Tommy didn’t even realise what he was doing until it was done. “A beginner mistake you’d think they would have caught. That’s a terrible hold, someone could knock it out of your hand easily.”

“W-. Wait.”

“You heard me.”

“That was...” His eyes travelled up to Ranboo. “Oh yeah. Of course it was.”

“It’s an open secret really.” Wilbur put the mask back down. “We’re the leaders, but of what. Some ominous organisation? Well they can’t say that because that says we’re somewhat organised and they want to portray us as dangerous, reckless people, they can’t admit we have contacts everywhere. Even in the Enforcers, believe it or not.”

“Kristin’s literally the police commissioner.” Ranboo said quietly. “It goes pretty far.”

“I know, I know, I just didn’t think about it.” It came out as more of a whine than he meant it to, almost pitiful. Childish.

“Of course you didn’t. More weight on your back foot.” Techno instructed. “They made sure you didn’t.”

“This isn’t a fucking lesson. Swords or politics.” He tried to shove him aside

“You’re making me miserable with that kind of technique so it will be.” Tommy grunted, tossing the sword aside out of spite and the elder relented, leaning against a workbench stacked with an assortment of wires and tools to watch.

“I don’t know if you’re the kind of person...”

“To trust with that power?” Wilbur asked. “Me neither. There’s a reason Phil’s the brains and we’re just brawn. I just say what they tell me to.” He said cheerfully. Techno grunted at that, rolling his eyes

“I wish you would.”

“People will die.” Tommy stated

“Haven’t they already.” Wilbur rose to his full height. Ranboo looked back and forth between them, unsure if he should intervene

“Ranboo can I talk to you? Alone?”

“Uh. Sure.” Tommy grabbed his arm, dragging him over to a far corner.

“Are you alright?”

“Dunno, to be honest.” Tommy leaned his head back against the wall. “Just needed normal people. This is all too weird.”

“You get used to it.” He said hopefully

“I hope so. I fucking jumped when he opened that cupboard.”

Ranboo played with the piece of wire in his hands, twisting it nervously between his fingers. “He doesn’t think things through.”

“No shit sherlock.” He drawled, his tone much lighter than he felt. A kind of awkwardness hung between them, neither quite knowing how the other would react. Tommy’s gaze slipped over Ranboo’s shoulder, eying the brothers on the far side

“Techno’s staring at us.”

“Probably checking you don’t stab me or something.” Ranboo made a weak attempt at a joke. The piece of wire wrapped tighter around his fingers. “Not that you will, he just worries.”

“Doesn’t look like he worries about anything.” Tommy disagreed immediately, mostly just to start a fight. “Especially not you.”

“I don’t know. I’m Techno’s in the same way you’re Kristin’s and Wilbur is Phil’s and Tubbo is Niki’s. We’re a product of the people in our lives when we needed it most, and they’re all the people who would do anything to protect us.”

He was left unusually speechless at that, the other boy completely clueless to the gravity of the words that had just left his mouth. “Fucking sap.”

Ranboo just nodded, knotting the wire tighter and tighter. “A bit.”

Tommy leaned against the wall, pressing his hands into the cold stone for the reassurance of something solid against his back. “Why are you doing this? I want to hear it from you.”

“Why are you?”

“Don’t give me the Lethe answer. I want to hear you.”

There was silence for a few seconds. "Someone's got to." It wasn't much more than a whisper, as if he was afraid of what was coming

"How is this any different from the Agency?" He challenged again, the same questions almost for the sake of saying them rather than any kind of response. "Sending you into dangerous situations, putting your life at risk for the cause of helping metas."

"Because I chose this." Ranboo asserted again. "I wanted this, I had that choice. If the Agency found me first I never would."

"And what then? After that's all over, what's going to happen to you and me?" That took him a little off guard and he paused for a bit, studying the wall

"I always wanted my own apartment." He said at length. "Not like the one I have now, I rarely use that one, like a nice clean apartment with boxes of flowers. That would be nice. That's one thing the meta facilities didn't have, they were all named after flowers but they never had any. Something about a plant meta once."

"You're rambling." Tommy told him bluntly. "What was it like?" He asked, now curious as well. "You barely mentioned the facilities before, you said Allium and then I didn't push."

"Allium was weird." He replied, not seemingly too bothered by it. "I don't know much, I wasn't there for very long because they can't suppress my powers for some reason so I just left."

"Was it scary?" He sounded very young for a minute, the child's fear in the voice of a teenager.

"It's not a prison, but you can't leave." He said quietly. "It wasn't great, but I didn't think it was that bad at the time. They only locked you in at night."

"At the time?" Tommy prompted. "How about now?"

"I've...found out a lot more about them." He was scanning the younger boy's face for any kind of reaction at all, rubbing his hands together anxiously. "About what happened to Techno and Will before they were rescued. How the Enforcers made suppressors in the first place, all of that. I can't just sit around and watch it happen." The 'can you' hung unspoken in the air between them.

"Ranboo." Phil's voice saved Tommy from a response, calling from the other side of the room. "We're going to need you tonight, if you're alright with that?" He held up a piece of paper and the older boy looked at Tommy, waiting for a cue

"What are you looking at me for? We can talk later, you got work to do." Tommy said. "I'll bother you later."

That earned him a half smile. "Of course you will." They broke apart, Tommy heading back towards the other room, dragging his feet as if that would make it easier. There were raised voices coming from behind the door and as he opened it he could see Wilbur particularly animated, waving a

keyboard around in the air without too much care for anyone else in the room. Judging by the reactions it wasn't out of the ordinary either, Phil calmly ducking out of the way.

"What's going on?" He searched around for someone looking vaguely responsible, eyes settling on Niki.

"They're debating a name for you." She explained wearily. "Well, Wilbur is."

"I'm saying we should stick with Atlas." Wilbur called out. "I'm not debating anything I'm saying Techno's wrong."

"What's Techno saying?" Tommy asked her, choosing to ignore the others.

"Icarus." She told him, a small wry smile curling at her mouth. "He insists it's appropriate."

"Fucking Icarus."

"I didn't say Icarus was bad." Wilbur protested again. "The boy who flew too close to the sun, it's great, could be shadowing how he ended up with us. I just think mine is better."

"I have a name already, and it's Tommy." He flipped the older boy off. "Or Theseus. Get used to it."
"Ah but here me out." Techno's voice was dry. "It goes with Theseus. He also fell off something."

Tommy threw his hands up in the air. "For fucks sake!"

"Icarus." Wilbur repeated thoughtfully, rolling the word across his tongue as if to see how they felt. "I guess it's alright."

"Do I get a choice? Hey Ranboo back me up..."

The words died on his lips as he turned, seeing not Ranboo but the faceless figure from before, hood pulled up over his head, that featureless cast of a blank expression staring right at him with hollow eyes and a sealed mouth.

"That's weird." Tommy said finally. He tried to look away from the mask as if that would make it less uneasy, staring at the other boy's outfit. It was simple, functional, body armour built into the fabric, arm guards strapped over the sleeves, climbing gear hanging on his belt. "You don't have weapons?"

"I don't really fight." Ranboo admitted. "I'm not a fan of it, I tend to run infiltration missions." He tapped the belt. "Hence all the break in kit."

"He's going out tonight?" Wilbur glanced at Phil. "What for?"

"Need to pick up some stuff."

Techno sat half up, suddenly alert. “You need backup?”

“Stealth mission.” Phil answered for him as Lethe was busy grappling with a glove, trying to pull it over his hand. The scene was almost comedic, the Ghost of the Syndicate, a name he’d come to associate with some kind of mystique and skill reduced to pushing his mask up, biting the bottom of the glove and yanking it over his wrist with his teeth. He slipped the mask back in place, double checking everything again, seemingly oblivious to everyone around him.

Tommy stepped back, rubbing his arm uncomfortably, suddenly feeling very out of place. “Do you want me to go?”

“You can stay.” Phil offered. “You’re not exactly seeing anything you don’t already know.”

“He’s weirding me out.” He muttered

Ranboo pushed his mask up. “How about now.”

“That looks really weird. Your head is just sticking out of someone else’s body.”

“I look cool!” He waited for a response and on getting none wandered off muttering to himself. “Well I think I look awesome.” Tommy opened his mouth to retort, but Lethe’s mask slid back into place, and he vanished into thin air before he could speak, gone as quickly as he came, leaving Tommy staring at the carpet where he’d stood

Techno flicked a switch and the room dimmed, leaving them in a half light from the glow of the monitors, Kristin and Phil bathed in the small pool of orange light cast by a desk lamp as they poured over a file of papers holding god knows what.

“Catch.” Wilbur tossed a small object over, still in plastic wrapping. Tommy snatched it out of the air, unwrapping it, an earpiece falling into his hand. “Put it in.”

He fiddled with it for a second, tapping it. “Can you hear me?” His voice echoed in his ear

“We can. Lethe Icarus is online.” Techno reported, face carefully schooled of any expression but if he hadn’t known better he could have sworn he was smirking. A twin to the delighted expression on Wilbur’s face, waiting for Tommy to say something so he could rib him.

“Are we really sticking with that?” He gave in finally.

“We can’t call you your normal or persona name in case the lines get hacked.” Wilbur said with more than a hint of smugness. “We can change it eventually, but for now.”

“Fine.” He said in a way that clearly stated it was definitely not fine, in fact it was so not fine that Wilbur would be paying for this later kind of fine, but Kristin was glaring at him and so he rolled his

eyes and snatched up a holepunch from the desk, using it on the arm of the chair.

No one told him to stop. He made a whole line across the arm, looking around to see if anyone was going to try and say something. Techno was watching him, he didn't even try and hide that he was watching but he made no comment. It wasn't a test, and yet it felt like one. He punched another one, watching the scrap of fabric tumble to the floor.

Nothing came. He tossed it aside, bored and yet a little relieved somehow, as if he'd proven something to himself he didn't even know. "What's up...Lethe. I guess."

"Hey." Ranboo's voice crackled a little over the earpiece. "Haven't died yet."

"Aw man." Wilbur spun around on his chair. "Hurry up then."

"With dying? I'd rather not if that's not an issue." Ranboo replied, clearly a little distracted. Will pulled a face.

"I'm trying to threaten you don't be so polite."

"Alright."

"What's going on?" Tommy leaned forward, trying to get a look at the screen.

"Just a casual break in."

"I think you're joking or not." Will leaned back, showing him a tablet in his hand. It showed a map, with a blinking marker labelled Lethe, currently in the centre of the financial district.

"Kind of, not a robbery yet. Just scouting things, retrieving something from an office, that kind of thing." He stared at it for a few beats, as if it would make more sense that way before slumping back in defeat.

"Sure."

There was a low hum of chatter that eliminated the need for him to contribute much. Kristin and Phil were deep in conversation, easy banter going back and forth across his headset from the brothers to Ranboo, almost domestic for what it was. Tommy pushed himself back into the shadows a little, away from the light and the noise, trying to take it all in.

He could feel someone join him, standing over his shoulder, waiting silently for him to speak.

"Niki is this real." He asked without looking up.

"It is." She didn't question him, or ask him if he was alright, waiting patiently for him to say what he had to.

“You really think they mean it? They really want to help?”

She nodded solemnly, and a reassuring hand settled on his shoulder. “You are not alone. We are not alone, we never have been.” The words felt warm, settling in his chest almost comfortably, the one thing he’d needed to hear but never quite believed when he had. “All that time we were out there talking about the futures we could never have, talking about all the things we wished we’d be allowed to do, there were people here, fighting for us, and I think you know it too.”

“And fighting us.” Tommy muttered, still a little cynical, but the weight had fallen from his shoulders.

“We would have killed them. They would have saved us.” She pointed out. “At the very least they’re the better of two evils.” Tommy found himself nodding along, watching Wilbur flick paper clips over the table.

“They don’t look very evil right now.”

“No they don’t.” She looked down, silhouetted against the light a little, it almost looked like she had a halo. He was about to poke fun, but she looked serious. “Thank you for hearing me out.”

He grinned up at her. “You’d probably clart me if I didn’t.”

“Nobody’s clarting anybody.” Kristin called over. “Or I’ll be having words.”

That caused a wave of laughter from the other side of the room. Tommy stuck his tongue out at Wilbur in retort, before slumping down. “Whatever. You were right I guess. I’ll see how it goes.”

Chapter End Notes

And there we go!

I am still getting back into the swing of writing so it's an easy chapter to start off with but hopefully you enjoyed it, and I'm aiming for much more regular updates from now on! As always, thank you for all the love on this fic and your patience while I've been away it means the world

Also! I've been seeing more posts on tiktok so make sure to use #welcomehometheseusfanfic if you want to make sure I can see them, I'll be sharing any I can find or am sent, I'm @eriswrites on tiktok if you want to tag me

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Fire on fire

Chapter Notes

Quick note, the discord link on a few chapters was broken, I'm fixing it atm but the one at the end of this chapter works if you missed it before. Also this is the celebratory 2k kudos update, I hope y'all like it!

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Tommy had no idea how he got home after the meeting, or quite how he woke up the next afternoon in his own bed. He was only jolted into motion by Kristin's voice yelling at him to get ready for work. Ranboo was already gone, so he had to catch the bus, the sky darkening early, swollen with heavy rain that began to pour down in sheets as he skidded off at his stop, running up the hill. The wind was picking up as well, and he shivered, already commiserating having to patrol in that weather, digging through his bag for the hand warmers Kristin always insisted he took for just this.

He got changed quickly, already late, stuffing his things away and walking out into an oddly full lobby. The late afternoon shift was gathered around in little groups, the apprentices up on a balcony on the second level. He trotted up the stairs, waving to Void. "Where are we going? What's happening?"

"No clue." Eryn answered, bored. "We haven't been told, everyone's waiting. Also listen to that."

The distant sound of raised voices drifting down through closed doors. It was drawing unsettled looks, Puffy glancing up from a conversation with Foxtrot with an uneasy expression as they grew louder and louder.

The door slammed open with force and Blaze strode in, fire licking across his fists, Android hot on his tail looking furious, but one glare from Puffy silenced any further argument from the both of them. Blaze didn't acknowledge anyone, making a beeline for the door, storming out of the building into the rain without a word

"What the hell is going on?" Tommy stared after him in bewilderment.

"Blaze and him got called in by Enforcers to chase some metas trying to escape across the border." Spark told him, lowering his voice. "They got away, Android's claiming Blaze sabotaged him."

Tommy stopped what he was doing, turning to look at Eryn. "Well? Did he?"

"I don't know. Wasn't there." Spark leaned on the railings, pulling a lighter out of his pocket and beginning to play with it absentmindedly.

"Where did he go?"

"Probably to cool off." He said casually. "Fire powers are hard to put out when you're angry."

“What do you need a lighter for?” Purpled broke his silent study of the room, looking him up and down. “You’re a human torch.”

Eryn held it up to the light, tapping it with a knuckle. “Lighter fluid. It’s pretty tiring to fuel a fire on nothing, it’s easier if you’ve got a fuel.”

Purpled raised an eyebrow. “So you have a lighter, and not, I don’t know, something useful like a can of petrol.”

The other boy pouted. “They won’t let me.”

“Gee I wonder why,” Ranboo muttered. Eryn slapped it down, looking irritated.

“Are you done?”

“Alright blaze boy,” Purpled said shortly. “No need to be like that.”

“Did anyone ask?” Eryn shot back. “And my name is fucking Eryn.”

“Blaze boy,” Purpled repeated flatly, his tone never changing, a challenge in itself.

“Ah.” Puffy was suddenly in the middle of them, sensing trouble almost on instinct. “That’s enough from both of you, I’m not keen on another argument this evening.”

“Puffy!” Void lit up. “Do you know what’s happening?”

“No, the Warden will be here in a minute to explain so don’t...”

“I’ll be what.” The man in question appeared from behind her, and the ram hybrid jumped, before rolling her eyes.

“Please don’t do that.”

The Warden was out of his armour, just his mask left of his normal wear, bags under his eyes, brown roots showing through green hair, trident grasped in one hand like he was leaning on it more than using it as a weapon.

“Wait what?” Tommy tore his eyes away before he got told off for staring, finally processing what was just said.

“Go home.” He repeated. “You’re off patrol for the night, same for the rest of you. The Tower is closing for the night.” Voices began to speak in a clamour but he cut it off with a raised hand. “Let me finish. Enforcers aren’t letting us out this evening.” He said stiffly. “Between the border crossing and the protests in the city they’re putting the city on an unofficial curfew. I don’t like it either.”

“Could have told me before I got all my gear on.” Tommy complained.

“Could have told me before I had to put up with this jackass.” Spark tossed a glare at Purpled, but it was harmless, the same bickering they normally did. “I’m going to go check on my brother.” He broke away, pulling his hood up, looking uneasily out at the rain. “I’ll see you tomorrow I guess.”

Tommy barely managed to finish a goodbye before he too was gone, disappearing into the rain. Puffy sighed, glaring at Purpled. “Stop antagonising him.”

“It’s fun. And you ruined it.”

“Purpled.” He didn’t deign to reply, striding off. Tommy glanced over, spotting Eryn's lighter left discarded on the side and picking it up, tucking it in his pocket so he could give it back when he saw him again. Puffy looked at the two of them curiously

“Not in a rush Theseus?” She teased him

“I don’t mind.” He said “Just got myself into work headspace I guess, give me a moment.” The Warden nodded sympathetically.

“I get that one. Sorry about the noise, I wish some of the adults had half your maturity sometimes, not a day goes by when those two aren’t somehow at each others throats.”

Tommy just shrugged, not sure what to reply to that, very uncomfortable all of a sudden. His heart began to pound in his chest a little, lost for words between the Captain and his superior both looking at him. Void reached out, putting a hand on his shoulder to reassure him. “Home?”

“Home sounds good.” Tommy agreed before he could lose his nerve. The Warden opened his mouth to say something, most likely chide Void for his power use but he wasn’t fast enough, they were already gone, reappearing in Tommy’s room. He turned to thank Ranboo but he vanished again, reappearing with their stuff, tossing it on the floor.

“There we go.”

“Oh my god.” Tommy staggered over to the dresser, leaning against it, covering his eyes. “I hate this.”

“It’s okay. He doesn’t know.”

“I’m going to say some shit.” He groaned. “I know I will.” He picked himself up again, flopping on his bed. “Whatever. I’m good.”

“You don’t sound good.” Ranboo picked his way over cautiously.

“I’m good.” He said more firmly, grabbing the other boys bag and throwing it at him, peeling his chestplate off, tossing it to the ground with a sigh of relief. Ranboo disappeared into the bathroom to change, reappearing a little later in what looked like his Lethe outfit, but with a dark raincoat over the top.

“Are you going somewhere?”

“Maybe. Are you?”

“The Warden mentioned protests in the city centre.” Tommy reminded him. “Kind of want to see what that was all about.”

“I know, I’m getting ready to go look.” Ranboo said. He unzipped his jacket, revealing his syndicate gear hidden underneath. “You can come with if you want. We could sneak out again.”

“I can’t exactly go with you looking like that can I.”

“Get your own outfit, just in case. Dark is best, nothing obvious, it probably won’t matter anyway as I’m not going to be seen.”

Tommy wavered, indecisive. “But what if we get caught.”

“Then I’m bad at my job.” Ranboo said lightly. “We’ll be fine.”

“I thought it was me that made the bad decisions.” Tommy muttered, but he was already snatching Techno’s black leather jacket off his chair, zipping it up, pulling the hood over his head. Ranboo tossed him a bandanna.

“That’ll do. City Hall? That seems central enough.”

He didn’t even manage to before they were gone, and then back again. Ranboo had put them in almost the same spot they had when they had the night it had all come crashing down, slightly under one of the trees at the side, near the wall Tommy had collapsed against, so incredibly mundane now after everything that had happened in that concrete and brick place. The building was still covered in scaffolding but some of it had been lifted away now to reveal the new ceiling, almost a perfect replica of the last one, lit by floodlights.

“Looking good.” Tommy admitted at length.

“It’s been months, I think they’re nearly done.”

“Cool.” He let out a long breath, staring up at it.

An elbow nudged him without much force, but enough to jolt him to attention. “What are you thinking about?”

“I’m thinking I remember it collapsing around me.” He said numbly. “I didn’t think I’d be able to hold it, but Niki stayed with me. I don’t think I could have done it without her.”

“You weren’t supposed to be there.”

That got an amused huff. “No shit.”

“I tried to get you out.” Lethe said quietly. “I was trying to rush all of the apprentices out, that was my job.” His voice sounded wry, like he was smiling underneath the mask. “But you had to be the hero Theseus. You had to run back in.”

“Don’t call me that.” Tommy hissed. “What if someone overhears.”

“If someone sees me we have bigger problems on our hands than the name.” He pointed out, “And I’m not wrong. You ran back in.”

“It’s what heroes do, isn’t it, it’s what we’re supposed to do.”

“It’s what you wanted to do.” Lethe corrected him. “I tried to keep you from going in, they made you wait too, you were ready to plunge in and save everyone. That’s not your job, that’s just you.”

“Who the fuck made you so observant?”

The Ghost looked down at him. “That’s my job.”

Tommy shuddered a little. “I’ll fucking punt you if you do that again. It’s creepy. Anyway I don’t see any protests.”

“They would have been cleared by now. Besides, I don’t think it’s a riot or anything, look.”

A pile of flowers against the fountain, stacked high with signs of wood and cardboard, homemade, printed, drenched in water, next to what looked like fire damaged belongings just to hammer the point home. He knelt down, running his hand over the tributes, the flowers wilted, cardboard signs soaked through. “Give us back our homes.” He held one up, running his hand over the outlines of flames drawn in crude crayon. “Justice for the victims. Justice for the homeless. Arrest the Enforcers. There’s so many.”

His hand shook a little as he turned the flowers over, little notes attached, the words too often lost to the weather but he could only imagine what they said.

“There’s a lot of people out there like you.” Lethe said at last said quietly. “They all lost everything too, and with that video out there they know who to direct that anger to.”

“That you leaked.”

“That I helped leak.” He corrected. He reached down, picking up a child’s toy, a teddy bear, the arm and ear blacked, it stunk of smoke. “Can you see why?”

“Is it bad that I never thought about that. About the others?” Tommy scuffed his shoe across the stone, looking a little guilty. “I just kind of..”

“Focused on getting out alive? I mean yeah of course you did. We all did, Phil had it handled, you’ll have a new house in a few months.”

“I lost so much, you don’t just get that back.” He sat on the edge of the fountain, turning the sign over and over in his hands. “I don’t think it ever really sunk in.” He said quietly. “I know my home is just... gone but I didn’t realise it. Phil and Techno and Will made it feel like a vacation. A really fucked up one but you know what I mean.”

The other boy nodded quietly, just letting him speak. Tommy’s fingers dug into the cardboard, into the stick figures in the flames. “That was my first room.” He said quietly. “I always had to share a dorm with people. We had my first birthday at home in my room because I was so excited about it.”

“Your first one?” Lethe prompted. “Did you not have one before that?”

He shook his head. “Nope. Just the children’s home dorms I guess.”

“Don’t you want to know where you’re from?”

“Don’t know don’t care. I have Kristin now.” Ranboo took in a breath, only to very rapidly back down as a threatening hand was waved in his direction. “Don’t’ you fucking dare aww me. I’ll kill you. Besides, do you care who your parents are or something?”

“Kind of, yes.” Ranboo admitted. “I mean I have the Syndicate now, they’re like family, but it’s not the same as knowing.”

He nodded slowly, picking up a fire damaged clock. “They’re leaving everything.”

“I guess it doesn’t work anymore, good to give the Enforcers an extra job.”

Unease prickled across his skin, and he set the clock down abruptly, a weight sitting heavy in his chest.”

“This is depressing. Can we go?”

“Of course. Where do you want to go?”

Tommy shrugged uncomfortably. “I don’t know. Somewhere. Not home.”

“We can just wander around?” Lethe offered. “We won’t get the city to ourselves often.”

“We don’t really have a good history with staying out after curfew.” He reminded him dryly, drawing a laugh out of him.

“We’ll be fine.” He promised. “It’s not being enforced, they just told everyone to go home, and if anyone sees us we can be gone in a heartbeat.” Tommy nodded along, not really taking in a single word he said, just trying to get out of the square, away from the hall, away from the pile of burned

and broken memories, just away in any direction at all before he had to think about it too much, or linger there too long.

His feet led him down the old path from the bus stop to Eret's shop, footsteps echoing in the empty streets. Lethe followed a little behind, dodging out of reach of the street lights, trying to stay out of sight as they turned the corner into the market square.

The shop was boarded up, police tape crossing the door but through the cracks he could see bookshelves tossed across the floor, caught in shafts of street light. The books were sorted into crates, all packed up and ready to move, to where he didn't know. The beautiful copper lampshades Eret had chosen so carefully lay on the floor, dented and discarded, the displays torn apart. He traced a finger over the glass, a lump in his throat.

There was an odd noise to the side of him all of a sudden and he jumped, spinning around, but there was nothing there.

"Did you hear that?"

"Hear what?" Tommy ignored him, looking around, a little paranoid. A shape was moving towards them down the passageway, an animal of some kind, limping slightly. It came a little closer, forming into a bedraggled cat, white fur clinging to its body, limping through the rain toward them. It meowed pitifully, the sound he'd heard but distorted with the passage's echo, and Ranboo was right next to him.

"Cat!"

"Goose?" Tommy said at the same time. He stared at it, transfixed. "Is that Goose?"

"You know that cat?" He didn't get a reply, Tommy ran forward, throwing himself down in the puddles without a care, grabbing the startled animal and scooping her up, scrambling for a name tag. The cat let him, melting into his arms, shivering a little. A piece of metal fell into his hand, and he blinked slowly. "Goose! What are you doing here?"

"Icarus?" Lethe prompted

"Eret's cat." He mumbled into her fur. "Never left 'em alone. Where Eret went Goose went. They must have..." He didn't manage to finish his sentence but he didn't need to. His friend pulled his rain jacket off wordlessly, holding it out. Tommy clung on for a few seconds, unwilling to let go, before relenting, letting her be wrapped up away from the rain. She allowed herself to be manhandled, making a slight yowl of protest at Lethe at first but seeming too tired to make much of a protest, Ranboo holding her close to his chest protectively, whispering to her reassuringly, an unspoken agreement between the two boys as they turned to head out of the square towards home.

Tommy wavered suddenly, turning back, his attention caught by a tiny piece of paper stapled onto the shop door. He took a step closer, squinting in the low light. "This property and its associated holdings have been seized under the Metahuman Control Act, all assets are referred to the Department of Justice and will be auctioned off accordingly. All proceeds will fund the continued defence of this great nation." He read aloud

"Huh?" He pointed it out mutely and Lethe walked closer, adjusting Goose in his arms, squinting at it. "Oh." Silence held for a few moments, the rain splattering down around them in an almost mocking chorus. "That's normal, I think."

"I don't want them to have it."

"We can't do anything about it." He told him. "We got to go back and get this girl warm."

"Burn it."

"Huh?" Ranboo glanced up, confused.

"Burn it." Tommy repeated, relatively softly but his tone was like steel. "Or whatever, I don't care how, the Syndicate's done this shit before, we need it gone. I don't care how you do it, fire would be fitting but I don't want them to have Eret's money no matter what."

"I don't know if..." He was abruptly cut off.

"If you don't I will."

"But... Wait you're not kidding, are you." Lethe's voice switched to concern. Tommy's only response was taking Eryn's lighter out of his pocket. "How did you even get tha-. Never mind maybe we should think this through?" He cautioned. "This feels impulsive."

"That's 'cause it is." Tommy reached out, slamming his hand against the glass. It shattered, falling away, and he stepped inside, picking his way over the broken shards.

"We can get backup?" Ranboo tried. "We can ask Phil?"

"He'll say no." Tommy didn't even look back, casting an eye over the crates. He held out his hand, red light curling around it. A book wrestled free from the crates, a large paperback with some kind of intricate design on the cover, the kind of beautiful one Eret loved. Tears pricked his eyes and he brushed them away abruptly, tracing his thumb over the pattern.

"Beginners guide to Greek mythology." Lethe read over his shoulder. "Are we stealing?"

"We're about to burn it down don't act so surprised." He had no intention of stealing it, but now it lay heavier in his hand. He tucked it under his coat quickly before he could change his mind, composing himself. "Techno might like it."

“We won't have time.” The other boy glanced back nervously at the broken window. “Someone’s bound to come check that.”

“Exactly.” Tommy pointed out. “We’re in a busy area, the fire will be noticed fast, there’s no homes nearby, everyone’s gone for the night, it’s raining. We can be in and out and someone will notice it before anyone is in danger.” Lethe nodded slowly, both in defeat and a little reassured that it was somewhat thought through. “It's what they deserve. Look at the pile of stuff we just saw and tell me it's not what they deserve,”

“Alright, I got this.” He shifted Goose to his other arm, pulling something out of his toolbelt, hunching over the cabinet. “Disabling fire alarms, just for this floor. Buys us a little bit of extra time.” He shrugged, seeing Tommy’s surprised face. “Don’t ask how I learned that.” He snapped out a switchblade, slitting a wire clean through.

“I think I know.” Tommy snatched up a novel, flicking the lighter and holding it to the corner before he could change his mind, tilting it so it could catch flame faster. For a few moments they sat there in silence, watching the fire lick up the pages, before he tossed it aside, picking up another, holding it to the flames before tossing it down onto the crate.

He watched the orange flicker hungrily across the crate, jumping from book to book, an odd pit in his stomach, before breaking away, heading to the next crate, and the next, firelight beginning to flicker across the walls but he kept going single-mindedly. The paper was bone dry, the sparks jumping to the wood of the crates they were held in, the heat starting to radiate, surging up towards the ceiling

“It’s done. We should go.” A voice said quietly from behind him but he wasn’t paying much attention.

“Gimmie a minute. We need to make sure it set.” He grabbed another one, holding it to the lit crate in front of him

“It’s onto the wood, it’s set, that’ll keep it alive.”

“Just one more.” He protested, reaching for another one

“Tommy.” And it sounded like Lethe this time. Tommy waited another second, and then looked up at the older boy. A faceless mask stared back at him. “It’s done. Time to go.”

He jolted into motion, picking his way over the mess. The fire crackled behind him, smoke crawling across the floor towards the window as he stepped through, Lethe after him, jacket covering Goose protectively. They stood under the rain, staring at their handiwork with a kind of satisfaction, outlined against the red as it began to roar, fuelled by the fierce wind racing down the passageway into the square, unhindered by the torrent from the clouds.

“Don’t run.” Lethe told him softly. “But time to get walking.” He got a tense huff in response but compliance, the two of them heading briskly towards the far side of the square, the hissing of stream and crackle fading behind them as they turned the corner, Tommy’s heart pounding in his chest.

Ranboo yanked him into an alleyway. Cold crawled across his skin, and then they were on top of the tower they always visited, plunged into half-darkness with the streetlights gone. Tommy broke away, running over to the wall, leaping up onto it, staring out over the city skyline

Smoke slowly wound it's way above the city, twisting towards the clouds, visible only against the light. Already he could hear the sirens sounding in the distance, but the damage was done. The spark was lit, so to speak, and no amount of rain or cold could put it out.

He stood silhouetted against the skyline, the bandanna over his mouth tinged with the smell of smoke, the hole in his chest a little hardened. And where he'd grown used to the bitter taste of regret or uncertainty there was only a kind of sweet triumph

Chapter End Notes

Again, thank you so much for 2k kudos, this is so cool! Also, big announcement, I will be bringing out new projects soon I have King's Gambit, a winged Tommy, accidental vigilante/detective au with benchtrio, SBI and mumza not dying coming soon, so watch out for that. Also, we have a tiktok hashtag now as people have been doing edits of the fic which is just so so cool, and I check it so if you want to add to it #welcomehometheseusfanfic is the one to use

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The aftermath

Chapter Summary

“I won’t always be there to catch you when you fall Icarus.”

Chapter Notes

The song for this chapter is Atlas Drowned by Gang of Youths as suggested by Ellis

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

He woke up earlier than usual, with an odd feeling like he’d been woken by something he couldn’t remember.

His door was open, just a tiny bit, he’d shut it the night before. He scrambled to his feet, kicking a box out of the way. His clothes were folded neatly on his chair, instead of being flung at the doorway stinking of smoke, that was odd. Tommy snatched up Techno’s jacket, sniffing it suspiciously and sure enough it was freshly washed. But it was all too early for that to really register much as he stumbled downstairs dragging his duvet after him like a cape, sweeping it along the floor, bashing into cabinets on the way down.

“Good morning to you too!” Kristin’s voice drifted out of the kitchen door. He shoved it open with his shoulder and she turned to smile at him, grabbing a bowl and spoon from the dishwasher and setting them down on the table. “Sleep well?”

Tommy made a kind of non-committal noise, shoving his hair out of his eyes and slumping down on a chair. The room was quite warm, steam rising from the kettle, soft music playing from the radio. Kristin was stood by the pantry surrounded by shopping bags, clearly in the middle of a tidying spree

“Morning.” Wilbur sauntered in, far too cheerfully to be sincere. A smug grin was splashed across his face and he snatched up the box of cereal that was just out of Tommy’s reach, pretending to read the ingredients list. Tommy scowled at him.

“Give it back.”

“Huh?”

“Give me the...the thing.” He waved his hand at him, grabbing for it

“What thing?” Wilbur held it up, hanging it out of his reach mockingly. “Oh this thing? Nah you weren’t using it.”

“Give it back! Mum!” Kristin sighed, hands on her hips.

“Wilbur give it back.”

“Aw come on.” The older boy whined. “You’re ruining the fun.”

He slowly lowered it, fast enough to not get told off but still just slow enough to be a nuisance. Tommy snatched it out of his hand the moment it got close, pouring himself a bowl before it could be stolen again and Wilbur gave up with a dramatic sigh. He vanished, and a few moments later a canned laugh track of some old sitcom was echoing from the lounge. Kristin started humming along to the theme tune absentmindedly, stacking jars in the pantry.

Tommy stopped with the spoon half way to his mouth, before setting it down again. “Did you go shopping?”

She nodded. “I was up early this morning. Phil tried to stop me but I stole his credit card.” She said sweetly.

“And he....let you?”

“Well Techno was heading out any way to grab some stuff so it only made sense. Besides, we live here now too, and I know what you like.” She waved a box of biscuits at him.

“That doesn’t explain why he let you steal his credit card.” She waved this aside.

“He’s rich, he doesn’t mind. Besides we basically live here anyway, with how long the rebuilding will take.”

“We do?”

“You’re treating it like home already.” She narrowed her eyes at the duvet he was wearing. “Speaking of, you’d better put that in the laundry.”

“It’s just a bit of dust.” He protested. “It’s not that bad.”

“You managed to put your clothes in last night, you could have put it in with them.” She chided him.

“I didn’t...” Tommy trailed off, remembering the mysteriously washed jacket he didn’t remember putting in. “Oh yeah, forgot about that.” He lied instead. “I’ll do it after.” He turned back to his bowl quickly, shovelling cereal into his mouth, missing the knowing smile that tugged across Kristin’s mouth and the little shake of her head.

“Tommy.”

“What?” He looked up from his breakfast innocently. Phil walked in, holding a rolled-up newspaper under one arm, a dark expression on his face. He looked as if he’d already been up for a while, wearing a warm green sweater, cane clutched in hand as usual. He set the paper down next to Tommy, unrolling it with a flick of his hand.

Syndicate Attack Devastates Abandoned Shop Front in City Centre.

The headline was splashed in big bold font across the empty shell of a building that was all that remained of the bookstore, the walls around it scorched, surrounded by police tape. Tommy’s stomach dropped, seeing the devastation he’d wrought in daylight bought it all rushing home.

“What is this about?”

“You tell me.” Tommy replied mischievously. “Why would I know.”

“Is there something you want to tell me?”

His mouth was dry, but he gulped down another spoonful of cereal and put on his best disarming smile. “Why would I have anything to do with that.”

“Ranboo already told me.” Phil informed him. “Just wanted to see what you would do.”

Tommy switched immediately. “Aw man that’s not fair. You’re playing games with me.”

“You burned a shop.”

Tommy grinned at him, half in false confidence, half in arrogance. “Yeah and. What you going to do about it?”

“Nothing.” Phil looked stern but the briefest hint of a smile peaked at the corner of his mouth, clearly a little impressed by Tommy’s stubbornness. “Except tell you it was stupid, and not to do it again without a better plan, and to tell you Techno’s going to start training you.”

“Okay.” He turned back. “Wait wha-.”

“You can’t go and do Syndicate things without Syndicate training.” He explained. “I’m not about to let you walk out of here unprotected, you got lucky this time, I’m not taking the chance again.”

“Why do you care.” He retorted, deliberately not meeting his eyes. “Isn’t this what you wanted?”

Phil pushed back the chair opposite him, sitting down. He rested his cane against his leg and waited for Tommy to face him. “Mate you got this twisted. I want you to be safe. I want you to spend as much of the time you have left as a kid being a kid. I don’t want you to feel you have to prove anything to us, or do anything with us if you don’t want to. Do you understand?”

“Isn’t it kind of pointless.” He prodded his cereal, suddenly losing his appetite. “I’m clearly not a kid anymore.”

“And I’m not going to treat you like one here.” He said sincerely. “What you did was stupid and reckless and could have gotten you killed. You will be training with Techno, and it won’t happen again, and I will take steps to make sure you are as safe as we can make you, do you understand me?”

“You’re not my dad.” He said sullenly.

“We’re living in his house.” Kristin reminded him gently. “And Phil and I have already spoken about this, or I would be intervening.”

“Why are you worried about me. I can handle myself.” He aimed this at Phil but she intervened

“Handling yourself ended us up with a cat and a burned building.” She paused, and thought about it for a minute. “Which, I mean I like cats, but committing terrorism isn’t the normal way to get one.” That drew an awkward laugh out of the other two, breaking the tension a little.

“If you have anything else you want to tell me I’ll be in my office.” Phil rose to his feet, pushing the chair back in. “Have to finish another plan for the city council.” He aimed this at Kristin, who seemed to know what he meant

“Did they move the deadline again?” She asked sympathetically, getting a nod in return. “Want me to bring lunch up?”

“No no, I’ll be down for lunch.” Their talk faded into the background, Tommy focusing on the newspaper, running his finger down the column

Early reports suggest the so-called ‘Ghost of the Syndicate’ and an as yet unidentified figure could be seen on salvaged CCTV footage ransacking the building prior to the blaze, causing considerable damage to the windows, door and inside before it was set alight. Authorities are asking anyone who may have witnessed their movements before the incident to please come forward, as an issue of national security. Rewards of up to 10,000 are being offered to any citizen who provides intelligence that leads to the arrest of one or more of the individuals reported in this article.

The Manberg police chief said in a statement this morning that they are dedicated to ending the “reign of terror” the Syndicate have wrought by “any means possible,” and while at present their whereabouts are unknown, he warned citizens to be vigilant. Official advice is to speak to family and friends and remind them that in the unlikely event that a Syndicate attack takes place near you, to Run, Hide, and Report, do not engage with dangerous individuals and remember there are services here to assist us that can handle these kinds of threats.

His mouth was dry. He pushed it away, not wanting to read any further, a weight in his stomach. Phil picked it up gently from next to him, rolling it up and striding out, cane tapping against the tiled floor. Tommy spun around to stare at Kristin the moment the door shut behind him. "You could have told me he knew." He hissed

"You shouldn't have lied to him." Kristin said, smiling. "Let that be a lesson."

"I mean it's not like he hasn't done the same." He retorted. "He made this whole thing."

"Everyone has their flaws." She replied cheerfully.

"There's flawed people and then there's terrorism." He argued. Kristin shrugged, still smiling a little.

"Well, everyone makes mistakes." She gave him a very pointed look. "And you're very bold talking about terrorism on a day like this."

"That's not terrorism!" He protested. "They were going to sell the books and give it to the Enforcers! The people that shot you, it's not terrorism it's justice for Eret. Isn't that always what you taught me, about justice, isn't that why you joined the police force and all?" He half stood up from his seat, challenging her to reply.

"And that's why I left it, because it wasn't doing anything like that." Kristin answered, completely unphased by his outburst. "And that's why you've taken a stand against the Agency, for the same reasons."

"I-." The words fell short. "It wasn't like that."

"It was like that, and it is like that. You know they can't and won't get Eret the justice they deserved, so you did it this way."

"Are you annoyed at me?" It came out more plaintive than he meant to, a bit childlike. She shook her head fondly.

"Of course not, Tommy I'm proud of you."

"Really?" He sat up a little, pulling his duvet tighter around his shoulders.

"You worry me, and I wish you wouldn't, and I can't exactly undo what you did and I am mad about that because you risked so much for this." His smile fell a little. "But I'm proud that you've finally found something to really believe. As a mother this is both everything I wanted for you and my worst nightmare."

"At least I didn't get shot." He said cheerfully. "I get shot with the Agency more than I do here."

"Mmm." She turned away, suddenly very invested in sorting the pantry. "Not a goood thing. Not funny. Anyway, you're helping Techno today." She informed him over her shoulder. "He's waiting outside sowhen you're done..."

“I’m what now?”

“You’re helping.” She repeated primly. “And after last night I’d better not hear a word out of you alright?”

He gave in without much of a fight, not intending to push his luck for once, gulping down the last of his cereal and stuffing it in the dishwasher, grumbling all the way out of the kitchen just loud enough for her to hear.

Techno was sat outside in a pickup truck, the back covered with a tarpaulin but clearly full. Tommy took as long as possible, dragging his feet back down as he gave Kristin a cursory goodbye before heading out of the door, ignoring Wilbur and his sitcom. Techno waited for Tommy to get in and plug his seatbelt in before turning to look at him slowly. “You’re helping me unload supplies.” He said shortly. “Haven needs a dropoff.”

“I learn about the Syndicate and you turn me into a fucking handy man?” Tommy retorted. Techno held up a white box on his lap wordlessly. He took it, bewildered, opening the lid to reveal a cluster of doughnuts, freshly dusted in powdered sugar. “Is this...bribery?”

The elder paid him no attention, focusing on the road. Tommy took one suspiciously, biting into it before anyone could tell him no. His eyes lit up despite himself. “Fucking strawberry! Dude, this is cheating.”

“Is it working?”

“I don’t like this.” He mumbled, face already coated in powdered sugar.

“Your protest is duly noted, and ignored.”

“I was going to meet up with Ranboo.” He lied, having planned nothing of the kind. “This isn’t fair.”

“Consider it better than being grounded for nearly burning down the city centre.” Techno’s eyes flickered over. “Because let’s be honest, the only reason you’re not in serious trouble with how much danger you put us in is because we would have done it too.”

Tommy snorted, spraying sugar across the dash, earning himself a disdainful look. “That’s your reason?”

“Would it stop you doing it again?” Tommy shook his head stubbornly. “Then what’s the point. You’ll just be sneakier next time and we’ll have even less chance to fix the damage.”

“You’re not even going to yell at me?” Techno rolled his eyes as if that was a ridiculous thing to even suggest.

“Yelling at you would only make you fear me, not listen to me. Fear is a weak motivator, and outgrown fast. And cruel. ”

“Well sometimes...”

“Don’t give me Agency rubbish.” Techno cut him off surprisingly harshly. “You’re a child, not a military.”

“Everyone’s trying to give me a fuckin’ therapy session today,” Tommy mumbled through a doughnut, spraying crumbs all over his lap. “Gimmie the aux.”

“No.”

“Why?”

“Your music is terrible.” Techno deadpanned.

“Why?”

“Because I said so.”

“Why?” He was repeating it just to be obnoxious now, that irrepressible smirk coming back, a light dancing in his eyes at the chance to try and wind the other up.

“I know what you’re trying to do.” He had a tongue stuck out at him in return. The air con was found a few moments later, the switch clicking as it was turned on and off, on and off, Tommy staring at it intently. “Are you done?” Techno asked after a bit. The air con clicked on and off faster in response, angling towards his face with a blast of freezing air. “I’ll take that as a no,” He muttered.

He turned onto the broken track up to the warehouse a little more abruptly than necessary, throwing his passenger towards the far door. Tommy scowled at him, but said nothing as they rattled across the broken track. Sniff was stood outside as they drove in looking a little stressed, arms wrapped around her, pulling her cape tight. She waved them into the makeshift garage, yanking the door closed behind them before the engine had even stopped.

“I was trying to reach you but my phone died.” They said as soon as Techno stepped out. “Enforcer patrol went by earlier, but you just missed them, thank goodness.”

“A patrol here?” He asked, moving around the back of the truck to pull the tarpaulin off. “How come?”

“No clue.” They grabbed the other side, tossing it too the floor. “But lets get this done quickly.” They began pulling crates and boxes and bags off the back, stacking them at the side. Tommy wandered over, picking one up

“Where am I going?” Sniff waved her arm at the hidden door.

“Pull the pallet aside, down there, you know how.” They put another box on the stack, not really looking what they were doing in their haste. It swayed and Tommy rushed forward to catch it. He wasn’t fast enough, it tipped, sending a box of fruit hurtling towards him, slamming into his leg. Tommy yelped, collapsing to the floor and clutching his ankle.

“Tommy!” Sniff knelt down, concerned. “Are you alright?”

“My leg, it’s broken.” He managed through gritted teeth. Techno studied it for a few seconds and then shook his head.

“It’s not broken.”

Tommy groaned, flopping on his side. “It’s definitely broken.”

“That box hit you with a much force as a football.” He told him flatly. “I made sure of it, because otherwise it *would* have broken your leg and I’d have to listen to you complain,”

Tommy pried his eyes open. “What?”

“I nullify energy. That’s just kinetic energy. I can drain it, all the force goes out of the impact. Pretty handy in a fight.” Techno held his hand out, earning a string of curse words in response, before Tommy took it, yanking himself to his feet. He strode away self-importantly, trying to regain some shred of lost dignity.

“Legs looking better already.” Techno called after him as he grabbed a few boxes from the back.

“Steady on the stairs, they can be slippery!” Sniff added, hoisting up a crate of fruit. She was duly ignored as he plunged ahead into the tunnel, barely able to see over what he was carrying out of pure spite.

He made it almost half way down before his shoe hit a jutting rock, and he stumbled, jolting forward. A piece of ivy whipped around his shoulders, catching him and dragging him back from tumbling down into the darkness.

“I told you to be careful.” Sniff said calmly, trotting down behind him. “Now look what happened, you’re being reckless.” He grumbled, but shot her a quick grateful smile, and then continued down the stairs at exactly the same breakneck pace, only a little more careful on his footing at this time, reaching the bottom and pacing back and forth impatiently.

“Where are we putting them?” Techno asked, trotting down at a far more leisurely pace. “In the shop?”

“If you don’t mind.” Sniff joined them. “I’ll need a hand unpacking as well.”

The sight of Haven was almost familiar to him, the vast storm drains feeling much smaller now. It still took him by surprise each time, the sudden world that opened with the doors but with his box of cans and the quiet chatter behind him it felt so horribly mundane he couldn’t bring himself to be shocked.

“Hey Tommy!” Ranboo was stood on the other side by one of the drains, waving to him. “Over here!” Tommy dropped his box outside the store, waving unusually enthusiastically.

“Hi Ranboo! Tell Techno we need to do something very important.”

“No, you’re coming with me.” Techno nudged, steering him around. “Put the box away properly, you’re not getting out like that.”

Their footsteps echoed off the walls, with the soft chuckle of a small stream of water down the northern drain, chatter rising into the air from outside Niki’s bakery. A cat hybrid was stretched out on the floor underneath the sapling that grew in the centre of the grass, staring up at the ceiling, a woman sat outside, though outside was relative if he thought about it hard enough, in a rocking chair, knitting quietly. It felt so very normal, but with almost a kind of weariness, just a group of people trying to survive, and pass the time without the sun. Pity kindled in his chest a little, and he tore his head away, looking at the floor.

“Ant! There’s cargo in the car, we need a hand getting it down.” The cat hybrid rose to his feet, bounding up the stairs, disappearing. Sniff shoved the makeshift store’s door open, slamming their hand on the switch.

The light flickered on a little reluctantly, casting shadows across the shelves, which were a little empty of tins, clearly running low on stock. It smelled like wood and cold metal and a little bit musty, covered by a thin layer of dust. Sniff looked around at it sceptically. “I asked Aimsey to sweep in here.”

“Tommy can do it.” Techno volunteered him immediately, but luckily she came to his rescue.

“He doesn’t have to. There’s not much to do down here so someone will be happy to help.”

“He’s supposed to be in trouble.” Techno set the box down, brushing his hands off. “He can manage.” Sniff just waited patiently. He hesitated, and Tommy’s heart sunk, before suddenly relenting. “Fine, whatever, I prefer to work alone anyway. Go on.”

“Is there a catch?” He said cautiously.

“Yes?” He was met with a tight smile. “Back here in five minutes, if they’re taking the shopping down we can go train now.” Tommy barely waited for him to finish before breaking into a sprint over, waving Ranboo down. He skidded to a halt next to him, scattering gravel across the path.

“I have five minutes.” He told him. “How do we escape.”

“I’m meeting with Niki in a minute for a lesson so no escaping.” Ranboo told him solemnly, shaking his head. “I couldn’t possibly.”

“Wait you’re dancing?”

There was a burst of laughter behind them before Ranboo could answer and he turned to see Tubbo smiling, a slightly wilted dandelion crown in his hair, frisbee in hand. Aimsey stood on the other side of the grass, doubled over, sleeves pushed up and hands shoved into their overalls. "Again, again!" They cheered.

"Hi Aimsey." Ranboo waved a hand at her

"Hi Ran! Your friend is shit at this." Tubbo grinned lopsidedly, unusually unbothered by the insult

"She's short. I keep throwing it over their head." Aimsey lunged for him and he dodged out of the way, surprisingly nimble on his hooves. Tommy wavered, suddenly unsure.

"They've become really good friends." Ranboo told him. "It's great, he's so happy."

"Oh." Tommy forced a smile. "That's nice." He was guided away quickly before he could say anything more, Ranboo pushing him slightly up towards the bakery. It looked like it had just been closed up, a couple still sat outside chatting over pastries. Ranboo pushed the door open without knocking, walking in. "I'm here! And so's Tommy."

"Hi!" Niki's voice drifted down the stairs. "Ranboo check the ovens are off for me will you?"

"Will do!"

Tommy wandered upstairs slowly, knocking on Niki's door. "Hello?"

"Come in!" He stepped inside, only to be immediately dragged into a warm hug. "Hello you."

"You say that like I'm in trouble." He said suspiciously

"I know what you got up to last night." She arched an eyebrow, waiting for his response.

"Who hasn't." He muttered. "Seems like everyone knows by now."

"Phil contacted me just in case you needed to talk to someone, and Ranboo told me this morning as well." She turned around, sorting through her closet. "Not what I want to hear when I wake up but it's definitely something. Well done."

"Wait you're not mad either?"

"You made a choice, like we talked about." She said simply. "Isn't that what you wanted?" He nodded slowly, not really listening.

Something caught his eye as she turned to grab a pair of shoes. He pushed past her, catching the sleeve of something in the closet, pulling it out to reveal an almost familiar black wetsuit type outfit, a carefully repaired hole in the side.

"Is that your....?"

She nodded quietly. “I couldn’t bear to throw it away. I sewed it up while I was recovering, took the blue stripes off. I guess I can just use it as a swim suit when I finally go to the sea.”

He stared at it. “The whole, it has a gunshot wound doesn’t bother you?”

“It’s very strong, and very expensive. And...”

“And you can’t let go of it yet.” He finished for her.

“Can you blame me?” She almost whispered it, running her hand down the sleeve. “Part of me still thinks I’ll wake up in the morning and get ready to go to work and stop another car theft or shop robbery or something. I still think I’ll need it, so just in case I’ll keep it.”

“I thought you were done with Tsunami?”

“I am.” She slammed the doors shut. “Believe me I am. Now, Techno’s waiting for you.” She sounded much more firm, scooping her clothes up from her bed and stuffing them in a bag. “Go on, shoo.” She hurried him down the stairs. “Ranboo don’t forget your water bottle!”

“I got it!”

“Wait you’re coming with us?”

“Not much training room down here. We have to share.” She shouldered her bag, Ranboo shutting the door behind them.

“Ranboo’s taxi service.” He said brightly. “Which I’m not getting paid for.”

“I haven’t killed you yet.” Techno said flatly, appearing behind them, making both the boys jump. “Take that as payment.”

“I never quite know if you’re joking.” He reached out for him anyway, and then wind rushed in their ears. They were set back down outside the training room door, and Niki didn’t hesitate to shove it open. The lights flickered on, and she immediately claimed one side of the room, leaving the other with all the training equipment and the mannequins to them. She pulled a slightly worn mirror out from behind a storage area, setting down a bluetooth speaker, suddenly paying them no attention, singleminded. Techno dragged out a mat, slapping it down on the concrete. Tommy rubbed his arms, goosebumps crawling up them at the chill in the room.

“Hurry up!” Techno called over. “It’ll be warmer when you get moving.” Tommy didn’t bother to grace him with a reply, walking over as slowly as possible. “And get here by tomorrow, if you please.”

He tossed his things down, yanking his hoodie off. “I’m not really in training clothes.” He said, in a last ditch attempt to escape it

“Doesn’t matter, we’re not going to go crazy today. I just want to see what you can do.” He tossed the second staff he was holding, but Tommy wasn’t ready, fumbling it and dropping it on the ground. “Throw it back.” He moved to chuck it back but Techno shook his head. “Not like that. With your powers?”

He was confused, but he complied, feeling a little uneasy at the use of his powers outside of work but safer with how far away they were from anyone who could see it who meant ill. “Try again. Catch it this time.” Techno tossed it again, and this time Tommy was ready for it, snatching it out of the air, dropping back into a defensive stance automatically.

“Defensive. Hmm.”

“What about it.” The irony about the challenge in his tone wasn’t missed.

“They taught you to defend, not to instigate the problem.” Techno finished for him. “If you were any older or if we had any more time I’d try and train that out of you, but maybe it’s for the best.”

He didn’t mince his words any further. He shot forward so fast Tommy had no time to defend himself, fumbling his defense up to no avail. Techno’s staff thudded against his shoulder. He braced himself for the pain, but there was no impact. He stared at it, confused, and then back at Techno again, mouth hanging open.

“Kinetic energy, remember.” The words had barely left his mouth before he struck again, and again. Tommy yelped, stumbling back, trying to parry. It happened again, and again. Each time he grew a little more irritated, but Achilles gave no quarter, and this was Achilles, a kind of hardness settling across his mentor’s features.

“What is the point of this.” Techno didn’t answer. Tommy pulled himself back up, a little out of breath. His attention drifted to the dancers on the other side of the room, soft classical music playing out of the speaker, a little tinny, echoing off the walls but it worked. Niki’s hair was loose around her shoulders, free of the tight bun he often saw it in when she was dancing. Ranboo too was smiling, letting her correct his stance patiently, chatting back and forth, he looked so relaxed.

The staff flickered up to his throat before he realised he’d lost his focus, and then knocked him flat onto his back again. “Don’t get distracted.” He was told dryly. He scrambled back to his feet, now indignant, dropping into his stance before he could be told to, scowling at the other man, only to be greeted by a calm indifference.

This time he was faster, moving forward first, ducking the blow. Techno’s eyes shone with a kind of pride but he parried his attempt with ease anyway, knocking him back again.

“See, that was better.” Tommy challenged him. He got a slight head tilt in response.

“One day your life may depend on this. Better may not be enough.”

“I can fight just fine.” He spat, pushing himself up. “I’m not going to be fighting martial arts masterminds am I?”

“You need to be prepared for anything.” Techno informed him. “Better to be overprepared than not at all.”

“You’re spouting a lot of wisdom that I don’t care about when I can just hit harder.” Tommy retorted, not really meaning it, just trying to give as good as he got

“The first rule of fighting is to run away.” Techno told him. “Do not engage unless you have no other option, you never know what fights you’ll win or lose. If we fought every fight we wanted to we’d be long dead, strength is not the only answer.”

“Niki taught me that.” Tommy said stiffly. “To run.”

“Good for her.”

“To run from you.” He raised his head to see the reaction but the elder’s expression barely changed.

“You never listened.” He set the staff point down, leaning against it. “Did you?”

Tommy shook his head stubbornly. “Nope.”

“Not when Achilles challenged Tsunami, two people wildly out of your skillset and yet you got in between. Not when Jester jumped you with all of his men, not when we held a knife to Ranboo’s throat so you’d stop looking into business that wasn’t yours, not when Orpheus stood over Kristin, you don’t back down. You don’t learn.” He pressed. Tommy just shrugged, pacing back and forth across the mat.

“And? I’m still alive.”

“We’re planning an attack in a week.”

He froze midstep. “What?”

“You heard me.” Techno repeated calmly “It was decided last night after you went to sleep.”

Tommy staggered up, jaw half open. “What...”

“Whatever is in that thing has the power to overthrow Schlatt for once and for all, or he wouldn’t be so afraid of it.

“Why are you telling me this.” Tommy turned on him, shoving his hair out of his eyes. “What’s the point.”

“The point is, the danger is here.” He explained. “There isn’t any time for this, this is real.” He pointed his staff at Tommy’s chest, prodding him with it, the boy too stunned to stop him. “This is happening right now, there’s no time for you to mess around. I need to see what you can do, how well, and how you deal under stress and pressure.”

Confusion flickered across his face, before he pulled himself together, trying to puff up his chest almost. “What’s the plan?”

“Persephone has an informant in the bank.” Techno began to circle him again. “We get in, we know the vault number, we have ways of getting access, we take what’s there and we track down whoever it is before the Warden finds them.”

“What if we don’t make it in time-.” He cut off abruptly, jumping back with a yelp as Techno lunged for him, barely fending the staff off. “Hey!”

“Pay attention.” He drew back. “An enemy could easily take advantage of you being distracted.”

He staggered back, watching him warily. “Don’t show fear.” Techno continued. “Head back, shoulders up, it’s a good defensive position, and half the fight is won in confidence. If your enemy doesn’t think they can beat you they won’t be able to put half the effort in.”

“I’m not scared.” He blustered. “I’m not a coward. I don’t give a shit.”

“Brave men die brave deaths.” Techno hoisted the staff up, stepping back to meet his gaze. “I don’t want a martyr, I don’t want a hero, I want to see you grow old.” He darted forward again, and this time Tommy caught him, eyes ablaze, shoving him back. “Good.” He praised, “Very good.”

He shrugged off the praise awkwardly, scuffing his foot against the mat. Techno waited for that to sink in for a few moments before tossing the staff aside. “Enough with the weapons. Show me how your powers work.” He walked around him slowly, arms folded. “Alright. You can throw plates at Will, you can throw rocks, you can hold up a roof, what else.”

“That’s about it, really.” Tommy shrugged awkwardly.

“Can you fly?”

Tommy jumped. “What?”

“Can you fly?” He repeated, a little impatient.

“I’ve...never tried.” He admitted. “I levitated a kid in school once and it didn’t go so good so uh. Yeah. No.”

“No time like now.” Came the brisk response. Go on.”

He closed his eyes, pretending to focus for a second before sighing dramatically. “Oh well, I guess it doesn’t work.” He dusted his hands off cheerfully.

“Now try properly.”

“What are you doing to the poor boy.” Niki called over. She paused the music, wandering over to get a closer look. Tommy reached out a dramatic hand to her.

“Niki save me. He’s trying to make me fly or something.”

“Good. The Agency wouldn’t let me teach him.” She addressed this to Techno, a little sour. “Claimed as no one knew how to it wouldn’t be safe to teach him.”

“Can’t you...” Techno made a motion with his hand. She looked a little surprised, as if she hadn’t expected him to know that

“A long time ago.” She said quietly. “I haven’t had that kind of power in a long time. But yes, you’re right, I should have been able to, but that wasn’t the real reason they didn’t let me.”

Tommy looked back and forth between them, confused. “What do you mean?”

“What do you think we mean.” Niki said wryly. “They wanted you strong, but not strong enough to threaten them.”

“They didn’t send out search parties for Tsunami. They left her for dead, same as they sent you both into that shop robbery. They didn’t care about you.” Techno began to circle him again, arms folded, and Tommy turned, not wanting to let him out of his site. He made no move to strike though, eyes piercing, waiting for a reaction. “We weren’t to blame for the metas that turned up dead in the alleyways, who was.” He continued. “Your friend, the bookshop person, they should have been sent to a facility, to Allium, Sunflower, Poppy, something, one of the secure facilities. They were an illegal meta, not a threat, that’s not normal procedure.” Techno pressed. “Did you ever ask why? Did you even think to question it?”

“I did!” He protested. “Niki always...”

“Niki questioned it for you. Not you.” He interrupted

“What was your whole spiel about me being a kid for then!” Tommy snapped at him. “Why would you say all that if you clearly don’t give a shit and just want me to fix your problems!”

“Tommy.” Niki said gently. “That’s enough.”

He was glowing, red light tracing across his skin, eyes almost white, it was an eerie sight. The staff next to him was hovering in the air, small bits of debris rising from the floor, the edges of the mat pulling up. Ranboo stopped what he was doing to watch, mouth half hanging open. The lights flickered, their covers rattling, and the glow dimmed, nearly disappearing in his sudden unease at what he’d just done. He squeezed his eyes shut, willing it all away.

“No don’t stop!” She reached out, taking his hand, “I’ve got you.”

Without any warning he torn back to a much younger Tommy, fresh out of school, teary eyed and yet hopeful, scared and yet ambitious, and still so wholly out of his depth. The Agency training room was larger than ever to him as he lay on the mat, barely 15 years old, out of breath and exhausted, outmatched and unhappy, the Warden stood over him urging he get up. Tsunami reached out her hand to him, helping him up gently, brushing him off. She stood him up straight, picking up his staff and placing it back into his hands, correcting his grip before whispering an encouraging word into his ear.

“There you go!” Pride laced through her voice. He opened his eyes slowly, and immediately almost lost his focus, throwing his hands out as if that would steady him when he stood on thin air. Niki gripped his hand. “You’re barely off the ground don’t worry.”

“What do I do.” He tried to hide his panic but his voice wavered more than he’d like, his arms trembling a little.

“It’s like ice skating.” She pushing him a little. “You need to be confident, if you falter, you fall.”

“I don’t know how to ice skate.” The joke was a little strained, but it didn’t matter, the false confidence helping him more than he knew.

“Don’t worry, it won’t hurt as much as ice skating.” Techno chipped in.

“That’s not what I need to hear.” He replied. He floated forward somewhat uneasily in pure defiance, something to prove under the older man’s critical gaze, slowly picking up speed. It felt so new, and yet so old, so natural and that feeling emboldened him even more, the rebellion of it all both terrifying and a driving force.

“Finally.” Techno tried to sound gruff, but it was more than clear he was pleased. Tommy tugged his arm away from Niki without thinking to stick his middle finger up at him.

“Fuck you bitch.”

“That’s what you get for winding him up.” Niki joined him in the teasing, beaming up at him and Tommy grinned back. This was just as it should be, as it had been, the two of them against everyone.

“Our abilities are linked to emotions, we don’t have as much control over them when we’re angry.” Techno explained. “It was a strategic choice.” Tommy was paying no attention at all, forehead all scrunched up. “It’s why Wilbur is so strong, he’s a man of impulse and he throws himself wholly into everything he does. So he can compel whole crowds if he wants to, and then some days he can’t even convince me to give him a lift.”

“It’s how you held up a roof.” Niki added, one eye on him warily as he began to raise up a little. “And why I couldn’t make much more than a small whirlpool when I left. The Agency hasn’t worked that one out yet, or maybe they have, and they keep our spirits down for that reason. Regardless, these are things only a meta can teach you.”

“I’m not listening to a word you’re saying.” He called back cheerfully. “Fuck your nerd stuff I’m flying.” His success was catching up to him, a sudden recklessness striking. He could hear Niki’s laugh behind him, bright and clear, Ranboo cheering him on. And then he was laughing, hand brushing against cold stone but this ceiling did not collapse on him, this world did not cave in and it felt right.

“Steady!” She called out. “Don’t look down.” But of course, that’s exactly what he did. He turned his head down and his stomach dropped. It was only a few metres but it felt like a mile. His concentration shattered with his nerves. And then he was falling, arms thrown out, an almost comedic expression of horror on his face as he dropped through the air to the floor.

He braced himself for the impact, crying out in panic, but it never came. He landed with little more than a slight jolt, bouncing off the mats and rolling a little, flopping down in the most undignified way possible, cheek pressed to the concrete. Techno strode over, kneeling down to his level.

“I won’t always be there to catch you when you fall Icarus.” He said, the faintest hint of a smug smile peaking at the corner of his mouth. Tommy scowled deeply, trying to hide the shaking in his hands as he scrambled to his feet, ignoring offered help and dusting himself off. “You’ll get the hang of it.”

“Did I ask?” He replied sarcastically.

He was only met with a laugh. “Wilbur owes me ten bucks.” Tommy’s head snapped around.

“Wait a minute. Did you bet on me?” He said, aghast.

“Will said it wasn’t possible, or you would have already done it. I said you should expect anything. I won. Now try again.”

Tommy groaned, looking at Niki for support but he was just met with a wry smile. “Come on. You can do it.” She said encouragingly

“Again. We’re staying until you get this right.” Techno pressed.

He rolled his eyes but went back to it with a renewed determination, an odd warm glow in his stomach quite unlike anything he was used to.

Chapter End Notes

Thank you so much for all the love in the last few weeks, we’re on the road to 100k hits which is surreal. And welcome all the new twitter readers who have managed to catch up, sorry for the delay on the chapter but I just had so much going on so here's a double-length one as a treat!

Tiktok hashtag as some people have been doing edits! - #welcomehometheseusfanfic

There’s also now a #whtfanart on Twitter which is crazy! Feel free to post on there, and tag me if you make any art I’d love to see it!

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Archangel duo

Chapter Notes

Thank you for 100k hits, this is absolutely insane and we're not even done yet! Also thank you to Ellis for checking over the chapters for me, we're the most professional editing team ever

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Tommy stood in the midst of hell. The floor was scattered with embers, the sky rained ash. The plaza stretched into forever, an endless landscape of ambulances and flashing lights and armoured vans. Screaming and running feet echoed around him, paired with gunshots and the acrid burn of gunpowder in his eyes and breath.

He was utterly alone. There was no Ranboo this time, no Void, or Lethe to have his back, no Eryn with a snarky comment, no Puffy or Blaze standing between him and the inferno that consumed the building in front of him.

A shape loomed out of the smoke and he spun around. Orpheus's mask swung down towards him, the same smug grin he remembered, and then it was gone, replaced by the dark hood and silver ram sigil of an enforcer, gun in hand, looming over him.

He tried to scramble but he couldn't move, suddenly pinned down under the slab of concrete that hadn't been there before as the faceless figure loomed closer. He couldn't move, he was helpless to stop it. A hand reached out, closing around his throat and he screamed.

He shot up in bed, suddenly wide awake, scratching his blankets off him. He was tangled up in them, a cold sweat on his brow, gasping for air.

"Hey, hey." A hand caught his, stopping him short of smacking it into the wall by accident. He opened his mouth to scream, still half caught in the dream before Phil knelt down next to him, reaching out and switching his bedside light on, chasing away the last of the shadows clawing at the corner of his eyes. He put an arm around Timmy's shoulder gently, pressing his other hand to his forehead, checking his temperature. "Nightmare?"

Tommy nodded mutely, suddenly exhausted by the exertion, sinking back against his shoulder without really thinking. "Yeah."

"You're okay mate, you're alright." He reassured him gently. Tommy flushed red but Phil just shook his head. "Will has nightmares all the time, I know I do. It's normal."

"It's not normal." Tommy muttered. Phil looked saddened

"It is for us. You're right, it shouldn't be, for most people it isn't, but it is for us. What was it?"

"Hospital." The grip on his shoulders tightened and for a moment it almost felt like a shadow fell across the floor, the echo of wings closing around him in an invisible cocoon.

“I’m so sorry.”

“It wasn’t really the hospital. Just sort of, just close enough. I don’t know why I’m telling you this.”

Phil smiled dryly. “I mean, I’m kind of the guy that organised the Syndicate response to that it sort of makes sense.”

Tommy’s eyes clouded over, staring at the wall into the near distance. “Ranboo said it was weird, way back when we got the call.” He recalled. “I just brushed it off as your usual terrorism, you know. I didn’t realise what he was trying to tell me.”

“He handled it well.” Phil agreed. “He let us know as soon as you got the call but he couldn’t say anything. He knew we’d never do that, let alone make a move without him knowing.”

“No, explain it to me.” Tommy sat up, pushing his blanket aside. He was aching, from the nightmare or from training with Techno he didn’t know, or care. “Please. Tell me everything I need to know.”

“You just woke up from a nightmare, maybe this isn’t the best time.”

“It doesn’t make sense! None of it makes sense, I need to to make sense.” He pleaded. “Maybe they’re stupid questions and maybe I’ve asked them before but I just need things to make sense right now because nothing ever does!” Phil nodded slowly, understanding. He took a seat in the reading chair on the other side of the room, clasping his hands in his lap.

“We had to see what was happening. The fear was that they would go after metas in the hospital in the cover of the explosion, we had to split their attention. We weren’t successful.”

“Did they...”

“No the metas were safe. They destroyed the blood bank at that hospital, that was the intention, if you want to know the truth.” He stated. “We worked that out very recently, it wasn’t just to make us look bad. Meta and hybrid blood transfusions are a difficult thing, we’re human but with some...odd genes so it needs very specific matches they don’t quite understand yet, it has to be either relatives or it’s pot luck and there’s not many donors so that place saved lives.”

“And they destroyed it.” Tommy said numbly.

“And they destroyed it.” Phil agreed. “And it was written off as a casualty of the attack.”

“You really think that’s what they meant to do?”

“I saw what happened to my colleagues.” Phil said stiffly. “Much like you saw what happened to Tsunami. I think we both know what they’ll do to get rid of us.”

“Like Mum.”

He shrugged, folding up a jumper discarded on the floor. “If it helps I don’t think the original intention was to have her killed.” He explained “She was in a meeting that evening in your house,

away from where she was supposed to be where she'd be caught in the fire, they meant to keep her out of it but she had to go and get involved, and that was a risk for them."

Tommy smiled weakly. "That's my mum."

"You're very alike in that way. Both fighting to save everyone long after there was nothing you could do."

"Okay." He said finally. "Alright. Facts, I know facts, I can deal with facts. Facts are good."

"This feels like the wrong thing to tell someone right after they wake up from a nightmare." He pointed out wryly. Tommy looked intent, brow furrowed.

"No I wanna know." He insisted. "I can make sense of it if I know."

"I understand." Came the simple reply, and it really felt like he did. There was no judgement, he didn't hold back or try and make it sound nicer, or try and make him feel better, there was a level of respect in Phil's tone that Tommy warmed to without even meaning to. He understood, he'd been in similar situations no doubt. Somehow across time and everything at all the Agency still tied them together.

"Did I wake you up?" He asked

"Nope." Phil patted his clothes, and Tommy finally registered he was dressed in somewhat smart clothes, green knit sweater and all. "I was going to head into the office this morning. Want to come with me?" He heaved himself up, no cane for once, his back clearly giving him a little less trouble. He seemed to be making the most of the respite.

"To your work?" He asked, confused. "Sounds boring."

"Just to grab some things." There was no response. "We can get breakfast, if you want?" Tommy perked up a little. "Plus Kristin and Techno will probably like having the kitchen to themselves, they were scheming up a storm last night about new breakfast recipes." Tommy screwed his face up.

"I'm coming with you then."

"Sure you don't want to stay and be a taste tester or something," He pushed the door open, one eyebrow raised almost teasing, though still a little concerned, watching him carefully for any signs of shakiness or emotion. Tommy screwed up his face

"They'll get Ranboo or someone to help." Phil inclined his head, closing the door slowly.

He dragged on his least ratty hoodie, not caring much for how he looked, flattening his hair before bursting out of his room. Phil appeared outside the kitchen, finger on his lips seconds before Tommy began his normal thundering stampede down the stairs and he stopped dead, tiptoeing down instead, slipping into the kitchen and rummaging through the fridge for a snack.

"Good morning."

Tommy froze in place as if he'd been caught in the act of something he shouldn't, looking at Phil for support as Kristin appeared in the doorway, wearing a warm dressing gown, looking a little sleepy.

"Good morning." She repeated. "Are you sneaking out?" A half smile played across her mouth, glancing at Phil who nodded solemnly, playing along

"I'm afraid so."

"Well bring some milk back if you are, Wilbur's going through it like wildfire. And some bread, and." She paused, "You know what I'll text you a shopping list."

"Didn't you go shopping the other day?" Tommy asked, bewildered.

"Yes but you never get everything you need." She told him. "And besides, I haven't been able to cook properly in years I'm taking full advantage of being able to now."

"You're alright with me stealing him for the day." Phil asked quietly

"If he's fine with it then of course, and if he wasn't I don't think he'd have been that quiet." She pointed out. "Just bring him home in one piece, if possible."

"I'm right here." Tommy folded his arms, scowling, but they paid him no mind.

"I'll try my best." Phil promised. "But you know what he's like."

"Did you turn the heating off last night?" She asked sleepily

"I don't think so, I'll ask Techno to check that later, he knows how to fix things I just tell him how to do it."

Tommy began to make loud retching noises, miming throwing up into the sink, causing laughter behind him.

"Alright we'd better get going. Before he crumbles into the floor out of embarrassment, or something."

"No he'll be fine." Kristin pulled him into a quick hug. "Behave yourself."

"I'm not a chiiiiiiiild." He drawled, dragging himself away towards the door.

"Sure you aren't. I'll see you later." She accompanied them to the door, standing in the porch with her hands wrapped around her cup of tea as they got into the car. Phil pulled out of the drive way and she waved to them until they were out of sight, Tommy pretending to ignore her. The sky was still dark, raindrops tapping against the roof.

Edges of grey were creeping against the skyline but the clouds dampened them out.

"Another wave of hybrids went missing last night..." A handband hit the radio before it could get any further. Tommy looked at him curiously.

“Not us.” Phil said grimly, staring out into the rain. “Not us.”

The atmosphere in the car turned somber, something sinking in Tommy’s chest. He curled up in his seat, playing a game on his phone to the calm backdrop of rain and the hum of windscreen wipers, back and forth as they crossed the city.

They rolled up to a large glass tower, a gate closing off the entrance. Two Enforcers stood outside, one beginning to approach the car as they turned in. Tommy spun around to stare at Phil, who looked just as confused.

“Wha-.”

“It’s okay, I’ll handle it.” He smoothed his sweater down, taking a deep breath before rolling his windows down. It was like Tommy was looking at a different person, Phil’s spine straightening, an odd light in his eye.

“What’s the meaning of this?”

“New safety procedures.” The Enforcer told him, sounding bored. “Reports of terrorism threats on major businesses so orders are to keep guard. It’s for your protection.”

“I didn’t consent to this. I’ll be having a word with your commanding officer.”

The Enforcer shrugged, handing the papers back. “What about him?”

“He’s with me.” Phil interrupted. “We didn’t bring papers for him because I didn’t expect to be stopped outside my own company.”

“I need papers.”

“It’s my company.”

“If you don’t comply I’ll have to....”

Phil said something too quiet for him to hear, but whatever it was made the Enforcer go pale and back off immediately. “No sir, it’s not an issue. I’ll let them know.”

“Good. We won’t be bothered again I trust?”

“Of course not. I’ll see what I can do.” Phil barely waited for the gate to go up before driving past, not giving them a second look. Tommy stared at him in a kind of awe as he pulled in.

“What did you say to him?”

“Friends in high places.” Was all he got in response. Phil seemed preoccupied, grabbing his bag and heading into the foyer at a brisk trot, Tommy rushing to keep up. It immediately screamed money, all fancy chairs and plants crawling up the walls that stretched up near two stories high, curved glass and wood panes, but also it felt safe, the air warm and he could smell coffee drifting up from somewhere.

“Like the decor?” Phil murmured. He brushed his hand against a flowering vine crawling up to the second floor. “A goodbye present from Persephone.”

“Sniff did this?”

Phil glanced around, making sure no one could hear. “She used to work here before we had to move her out so yes. They did this.”

“I smell coffee.” There was a distant clattering of plates as if to confirm what he’d said.

That got him a chuckle. “I’m not giving you coffee, but yes there’s a cafe here for employees. I can get breakfast sent up, it’s much quieter in my office, but I’ll sort that in a minute.” He walked up to the front desk, making direct eye contact with the woman there, who rose to her feet.

“Sir...”

“Enforcers.” He didn’t need to say anymore. The receptionist shrunk down.

“Letter came from President Schlatt this morning. He offered them as personal protection.”

“You know how I feel about Enforcers on the grounds.”

“We tried to tell them to leave.” Another man walked over, blonde hair and a casual blue shirt, looking a little irritated, a light northern accent pulling at his words. “Believe me. They weren’t having it.” Phil sighed heavily, a little resigned

“Thank you for trying Scott.” They exchanged an odd look that Tommy couldn’t quite decipher, before Scott’s attention turned to Tommy.

“Who’s this?”

“This is Tommy. Tommy this is Scott, he’s my head of security.” Phil said. “I need an all access card for him do you have any spare.” Scott blinked in surprise.

“You didn’t say you had another son?” He said, a little curious. Tommy looked horrified, but Phil just laughed.

“Oh no, he’s not my son, he’s just living with me for the time being, family friends. Their house was caught in the Enforcer fire.”

“I’m so sorry.” He exclaimed. “I didn’t know, I didn’t mean to, you know, bring anything up.” A card suddenly appeared from his pocket, an all black piece of metal on a lanyard and he pushed it into Tommy’s hands quickly looking very guilty. Phil took Tommy by the shoulder, guiding him away to an elevator on the far side, typing in an access code.

“Did you have to tell him that.” He whined, as soon as the elevator door was shut.

“Yes, unless you want to tell him that you’re my son.” Phil’s grin was evident in his voice even though he was turned away.

“I don’t like being pitied.”

“Me neither.” He said, a little more sympathetically. “But sometimes we just have to grin and bear it or he’d ask more questions. Scott’s very kind, but he’s got an ear for gossip.” He must have seen something in the younger’s expression. “You can trust him.” Phil assured him. “I’ve known Scott for a very long time, there’s a reason he’s head of security here. He... is aware of things.”

Tommy barely heard him, entirely distracted moments later as the elevator shot up, a view beginning to sprawl out beneath them, the city at their feet. He pressed his hands to the glass like a child, breath frosting on the panes as the ground fell away beneath them. Phil leaned back, watching with a proud smile.

It was over all in a few seconds, a quiet ding signalling their arrival at the top floor. He almost had to tear Tommy away into a quiet corridor. It was well lit, the floor carpeted and low yellow lights on the walls leading up to a large door, Phil’s name engraved on the metal panel on the front.

“You first.” Tommy didn’t need to be asked twice, shoving the door open in his excitement. The office was huge, a small seating area at the far end with a mini fridge and a basket of snacks, one wall just a sheer wall of glass looking out over the city, a desk tucked away in the corner. The walls were covered with architectural drawings and artists impressions neatly framed among bookshelves and fake plants.

“This is fancy.” Phil was really smiling with a kind of warm pride at the youngers awe.

“Thank you. I worked hard on it.”

“You built all this?” He ran over to the window, looking down at the Enforcers below, now ants beneath them.

“I did. I got lucky, people would kill for this land. I got it after the previous building was foreclosed, and a few investments and a bit of record falsifying later and it was all mine.”

“How? Why?”

Phil smiled. “Appearances are everything Tommy. Because I looked successful I got into places an unheard of businessman shouldn’t have been able.” He frowned. “Unfortunately that means we now have Enforcers outside the gates.”

“So you what.” Tommy traced a hand over one of the drawings. “Became an architect to rebuild everything you broke?”

“Well, no, this was my dream job. I love building things to last.” He sat himself down at a chair. “Things people five, ten, fifty, a hundred years from now will look at and love, there’s something special about it all.”

“Ew, sappy.”

“The City Hall hit was the exception, I’ll admit.” He agreed after a small pause. “That one did pay us well.”

“I knew it!” Tommy declared, snatching up a bag of crisps from the snack area. “I see right through you old man.”

“The city had been looking into redoing the roof for years as it was getting unsafe, and they reached out to us tentatively so we uh, sped up the process. The Sponsors Ball was a prime Syndicate target they already knew that. No one would think it was us, and that wasn’t really why we did it either.”

He leaned his head on his hand. “I mean really if you think about it it was the safest demolition of a building full of people you can have.”

“Phil!”

“I’m not wrong.” The elder continued dryly. “Worst came to worst Ranboo grabbed you all and teleported you out. We were looking out for you, believe it or not.”

“You took Kristin with you.” Tommy recalled. “Kept her out of the way.”

“She didn’t know, she was busy telling me all about you actually.” A fond smile crossed his face. “We were both talking about our boys, she’d take any chance to talk about you. Her sunflower boy, she has a lot to say.”

Tommy pulled a face, shoving him jokingly. “Don’t call me that. It sounds weird, only she can call me that.”

“Don’t let Wilbur hear you say that, or he’ll start mimicking it just to annoy you.” The boy made a wretching noise, drawing a laugh from Phil. Hel settled his arm around Tommys shoulders, and Tommy leaned into his side, gazing out through the dark glass at the lights of the city, warped by raindrops tracing down the panes. They fell into a silence, watching the sky turn grey as the sun rose in the distance.

“Do you ever miss them? Your wings?” Tommy asked softly. “Can I ask that?”

“On days like these, not really.” He said wryly. “I used to hate it. Water is heavy on wings as big as mine were, it would be awful, I’d be soaked through and miserable and cold and tired.”

“They didn’t show that in the comics.” He mused.

“They don’t show you a lot of things.”

“I used to imagine what would have happened if I ever met Archangel.” He confessed. “Whatever conversation I thought we’d have it wasn’t this.”

“Archangel was a lot like you. He believed the world could be good, he believed we could fix it from the inside if we only tried hard enough, and if it wasn’t working we had to try harder.” Tommy shifted his feet uncomfortably, but he didn’t try and deny it. “And as it got worse and worse, he still believed. If I hadn’t heard about the boys I might still be there.” His voice caught, and he paused for a second. “In the end it was the hardest way to learn you can’t save everyone. I’m grateful you didn’t have to learn that way.”

Tommy had a lump in his throat all of a sudden, leaning a little closer to Phil. “Was that really what it was all about.”

“Saving you? Yes. And everyone else the Agency took advantage of, that the Warden took advantage of, just like me.” There was a kind of steel in Phil’s voice, and an ice in his eyes that leant truth to what he said. It was both reassuring and a little intimidating, but not for him, Tommy could feel that none of that malice was for him.

“I was supposed to graduate next year.” He said numbly. “I don’t know what I’m going to do now, that was all of my plans. That was the only thing I had. I don’t even know if I’ll have a future, maybe they took advantage of me but it was all I had.” He looked up, half expecting to get laughed at but Phil didn’t say a word, listening quietly. “I mean. You’re the head of the Syndicate, in what scenario do I get away without people thinking I was involved, because there’s no way you can stay secret forever.”

“You’re surrounded by so many people who’ll do whatever it takes to keep you safe, no matter what you choose.” He promised. “Don’t worry too much about what might happen, you have to live in the present, there’s just no other way.”

Tommy nodded quietly, stuffing his hands in his pockets, a little awkward. His fingers hit an odd lump and he scrambled around in it, dragging a familiar black winged charm. Phil reached out, catching it

“Where did you get that?” He asked urgently. Tommy dangled it from his hand, a little wideyed.

“From the rally, way back. The day I found out about you, I kind of forgot I had it.”

“That’s dangerous.” He warned him. “You could get in trouble for that, and they’re upping checkpoints in the city as well, you don’t want to be caught with it.”

“What really happened?”

Phil’s eyes shadowed. “One day I’ll tell you everything.” He promised. “About what happened, what it was like, I’ll tell you all the stories about Grian and Scar and Impulse and all the others that they didn’t tell you the truth of but for now they’ll put you in more danger than it’s worth.”

“I’m already in danger, it’s too late.” He said sarcastically

“There’s also some things I’m not ready to talk about.” He admitted. “Secrets I promised to take to my grave unless everything changed, but maybe after this is over I’ll tell you what I can.”

“What happens after? Do you know?”

He pointed to a sketch framed right above his desk, a little cottage surrounded by trees, pretty picket fences deep in the rolling hillside. “I have a house across the border, on the other side of the sea on a small farm with an orchard and all, somewhere nice to retire and grow old in. I promised your mother and I’ll promise you the same, no matter what happens, no matter where you go, you’ll have a future

Tommy, you'll have a real life out there that will be all yours to choose, no Agency, no Control Act, no Schlatt. I'll make sure of it."

The calm assertion tore down his every resolve like it was paper. He stared at the sketch, little more than outlines but his mind started to fill it with colour, an alien place that somehow felt so familiar already. He mulled that over, stubbornly trying to keep a straight face.

"What if I choose to just never have a job." He joked weakly. "I'll live off your money, you're rich."

"Then you can do that." Phil promised him, completely serious. "And you'll deserve it, you've lived a lifetime already."

Tommy's mouth hung open for a few moments and he stared at him, not quite processing what he'd just heard. He closed it slowly, and then tried to play it off, turning back to the window sharply. "I can fly now." He tried to change the subject quickly. "I can show you, if you want. You could, I don't know, fly again?"

"Not yet, I don't think you can carry two people. But I appreciate the offer."

"One day." Tommy promised. He reached up, wiping his eyes roughly before glaring at the older man. "I'm not crying." Phil didn't say anything, just squeezed his arm a little.

Tommy buried his head in Phil's jacket, sobs wracking his shoulders, not with grief but almost with a kind of bitter relief, the last of a crippling weight lifting from his shoulders, guided by a feeling of safety he didn't yet quite understand.

Chapter End Notes

Thank you so much for all the art over the last few weeks as well, it's been absolutely incredible and it means the world to me. I'm going to start featuring artists in the end notes, just a few at a time so here is some of the amazing fan art for WHT

original story by eris soulfirephoenix

> d' <


*WELCOME
HOME
THESEUS*



cover by rayjay00

Art by the amazing @Rayjay00 on twitter

[Check out the art on twittter](#)

 Tsunami by @goblaln on twitter

[Check out the art on twittter](#)



WHT!Tommy by @blustrasa on twitter
[Check out the art on twitter](#)

If you have any more fan art feel free to pop it in #whtfanart on twitter and tag me so I can see it because it means so much to me! I'll be adding more art to the end of chapters so if you want to be featured be sure to pop it on the hashtag so it doesn't get buried! Thank you so much again for 100k, and I hope you enjoyed the chapter

Whatever it takes (or casual bank robbery)

Chapter Summary

“Well it’s only your family invited.” Tommy brushed him off. “You can’t just sneak anyone into a fancy party.”

“Eh, you know you’re like a brother to me.” Wilbur teased him. “I’m sure that’ll do.”

“Fuck you.” He grumbled

“Awww Tommyyyyy.” Wilbur wrapped his arm around the other boys neck, not tight but firm enough to lock him into a headlock, dragging him down. Tommy was yelling and yanking at his sleeve trying to get him off to no avail. The older boy pulled him around the room cheerfully, wrestling him without care for his new clothes or anything at all, shoving each other into the sofa to loud shrieks of protest.

Chapter Notes

Merry Christmas everyone! And enjoy WHT's longest chapter yet!

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

It was as if a switch had been flicked. The slow tension that had been building from the moment of the announcement had come to a head the morning of the mission. Tommy walked inside, scuffing his feet on the mat and kicking his shoes aside, throwing the kitchen door open. He walked into a full-blown argument, Techno stone-faced and calm, Wilbur’s hands flying as he tried to emphasise some meaningless point they’d decided to come almost to blows over today, yogurt pot clutched in one fist

He was about to intervene, most likely in the most unhelpful way possible when Kristin pushed him aside, storming in.

“Wilbur! Enough!” He almost looked as if he accepted defeat, and then spun on her

“Don’t treat me like a kid!”

“Don’t act like a child or I’ll send you to your room like a child.” She said sharply. She stood her ground, glaring up at him. “I heard you from the second floor. Apologise, right now. He didn’t deserve that over-.” She glared at the yogurt Wilbur was holding. “Breakfast.”

“It wasn’t about breakfast it was about him always-.”

“He didn’t deserve that.” Kristin cut him off. “And Techno don’t antagonise him.”

Techno rolled his eyes but said nothing. “Don’t you look at me like that I heard everything.”

“He needs to let off steam.” He said innocently. “I did nothing.”

“You are a grown adult.” She chided him, Tommy watching on like it was some kind of sport, grinning from ear to ear.

“I’m sorry.” Wilbur muttered. He sidled past her, making it halfway to the door in a hasty escape but something stopped him. He conjured a sudden smug grin and turned on Kristin, voice suddenly very sweet. “Is this what I get from saving you from being arrested?”

“When you were nine.” She told him primly. “You don’t get to hold that against me anymore, and we don’t talk about it.” The last part was said with an odd warning note. Wilbur looked as if he was about to argue, but given the previous discussion thought the better of it, settling with a cheerful wave and then making a rapid exit from the room.

“What was he talking about?” Tommy asked the moment he was out of earshot.

“Back when we rescued them, we had to split, Phil ran with the boys and I dropped back and rejoined with my unit at the time. He used his powers, made sure I could convince them that I was a victim of his.” She reappeared out of the fridge, a sandwich clutched in her teeth. “Had breakfast?” She asked, slightly muffled. Tommy nodded, but he wasn’t so easily distracted from the subject at hand

“As a nine year old?”

“He’d lost enough people that day.” She said shortly.

“That’s insane.”

“I know he’s not...the most reasonable at times. But he’s been through a lot and he’s trying.” She dropped a tub of ice cream on the side, digging in the drawers for a spoon. “Nineteen isn’t very old you know. Not even 3 years apart from you.”

“And one of us is a terrorist and one of us-.”

“Is a government-sponsored child cop. I know.” Tommy stared at her, ignoring the muffled snort from Techno in the corner. “Like mother like son I suppose.” She finished with a slight smile. “I was only eighteen when I joined the police force.”

“That’s not fair.” He grumbled. “You’re taking all my fun with your logicalness.”

“That’s not a word.” Techno informed him from his corner of the kitchen, nose buried in a book.

“Syndicate meeting in 10, Ranboo’s taking us.” Phil poked his head in, yanking his coat zip up, looking around for something he didn’t seem to find.

“Your canes in your room, behind the door, left of the trash can. Your glasses are by your bed, you left your newspaper in your office, I’m not sure which one you’re looking for.” Kristin told him. “I knew you’d lose one of them.” He gave her a grateful smile, drifting up the stairs.

The room was already set up for a meeting when they arrived, a few of the desks shifted to the centre to form a makeshift table. Sniff was perched on a chair at the other end, waving to them as they came in. Tommy barely reached the table before Techno turned on his heel, giving him a pointed look. The younger boy held up his hands defensively.

“Phil said meeting in ten and it’s been nearly that, there’s no time for training.” He protested.

“It’s good for you.”

“It’s good for you.” He retorted. “Me I’m bruised all over, can’t be good for me.” He didn’t like to admit it but it had helped, over the last two weeks it had slowly but surely gotten a little easier to fight for long periods of time, and he hadn’t been picking up as many bruises. But it was still far from a fair fight, and Techno had no plans to go easy on him any time soon either.

Phil whistled, drawing their eyes over. He was stood at the end of the table, sheets of paper spread between him and Kristin that they were studying.

“I’m not getting whistled to attention.” Tommy complained. Phil cast a slightly amused look at him.

“Well it worked didn’t it.”

“What’s the plan boss.” Wilbur kicked his legs up on the table idly before Tommy could think of a retort

“The rundown is, information we need on someone who can help us take down Schlatt is stored inside the bank, Persephone.” He gestured at Sniff. “has an informant on the inside that’s told us there will be lowered security today due to a training event on the outskirts of town.”

“She’s as reliable as can be.” Sniff agreed. “I trust her, and they’ve been trying very hard to keep this hush so she risked a lot by passing it on.”

“Which means this is our only window.”

“I mean we don’t even know what kind of person we’re looking for, or if the Enforcers have already got him.” Tommy spun himself around on his chair. “That’s also a chance.”

“If the Enforcers could bring him down, Schlatt wouldn’t have resorted to the Warden, would he.” Techno reasoned

“They’ve done this before, information is left in there until a mission is completed at which point it’s taken out and destroyed. Surveillance on the area shows nothing of the kind, which means not only do they not have who they’re looking for, it’ll still be in there.” Phil was having none of it, though half distracted by the papers he was holding.

“Schlatt’s getting old, he’s getting predictable.” Techno’s smile didn’t have any humour too it, more wolfish than anything, like a man on the hunt.

“It doesn’t matter, we have our plans for the evening and we’re sticking to them.” Phil cut that trail of thought off before it could spiral in any way. “We’ll be at an event in the inner city that I’ve been invited to, to provide an alibi for us and because there’s people attending we can’t pass up the opportunity to try and talk to. My sons both have targets to extract information from if possible. There’s a chance Jester will be there.” He looked over at Techno. “If he is...”

“We’re not getting anything out of him. He’s loyal to Schlatt.” Techno shut that down immediately, but Phil looked unperturbed.

“He’s loyal to money.” He pushed a piece of paper onto the table, a picture of a familiar man in a blue suit, a mask covering his face, and one without. Tommy stared at it for a few beats, eyes widening.

“You know him.” Ranboo confirmed quietly. “It’s who you think he is.”

“The-. The guy who shot me?” Tommy stared at his face, utterly bewildered. Phil’s eyes flickered up.

“The government weren’t willing to pass legislation for a new shipment of arms to the Enforcers quick enough, so Schlatt got Jester to source it off of street gangs instead so they’d be ready in time for the attack the day after. Lethe filled us in on everything.” Ranboo nodded solemnly, his expression grim.

“And they didn’t get caught for it?” Tommy managed at last

“What do you think Jester is for? He doesn’t get paid to get caught.”

“And who would catch him, Enforcers?” Kristin added. “He’d just get out again even if they did take him in. I was given orders to quietly release a few people from jail cells in my time. It was the only reason I still had the authority to save you after everything that happened with Eret.”

“The hospital attack was an excuse for martial law, and no one’s going to mess with heavily armed police.” Phil concluded. “But it doesn’t matter, it just means they’re recruiting faster than they can supply, somethings going to break soon enough.” He glanced over at Wilbur who was now intently shredding a piece of blank paper, gathering the pieces up in his lap. “You take it, I don’t need to know what he’s up to, I need a weakness, or anything at all. We haven’t got a single informant on him.”

“Some party.” Wilbur quipped. “There goes me having fun.”

Kristin smiled softly. “I’d say you have enough fun. Theseus was responsible for cleaning up your mess the last party you went to.” She reminded him.

The comment registered slowly, but when it dawned on him he went a little pale, before bursting out laughing.

“What is it Tommy, you look thoughtful?” Phil said, ignoring his son’s chuckling.

“Quackity. I don’t know if it’s important but he was in the party with Schlatt, the day that... Well, same day I nearly shot Will actually.”

Kristin looked up sharply. The mood switched abruptly as she glanced between the two of them. “Is there something I should know.” Silence. “Quickly.”

“Tiny disagreement.” Techno intervened before either Wilbur or Tommy could speak. “They had an argument, don’t ask me the details I wasn’t told them. It was fine.”

“Where did Tommy get a gun.”

“Stole it off me.” Wilbur cast his eyes at the floor. Phil glared at him.

“Why did you leave a gun where he could find it.”

“He used it to shoot Niki! How am I the untrustworthy one!” Tommy burst out.

One of those awkward silences fell, where everyone wanted to speak but no one quite knew what to say, eyes darting around waiting for someone else to go first. Quiet laughter broke it, and Tommy turned to see Niki in the doorway, hand over her mouth. “You know, if I knew Syndicate meetings were this dramatic I might have come more often. He’s got a point.”

“I’m here because Sniff asked to speak to me.” She signalled to the deer hybrid

“I don’t think you need any more from me.” Sniff addressed Phil. “I’ll be here, protecting Haven. You know, my job, the thing you pay me for.”

“Do I pay you?” She rolled her eyes, sighing dramatically before linking their arm with Niki’s, vanishing out the door.

“Everything’s set already I don’t get why we have to be here.” Tommy grumbled.

“I mean most of it is planned already, but if we’re sat around doing nothing all day people get restless.” Phil explained

“And then they argue.” Kristin added, glaring at the brothers. Wilbur developed a sudden interest in the carpet, staring at his feet and Techno whistled quietly, spinning around on his chair without making eye contact.

“Besides, things are going to start looking suspicious, it’s bad enough that I became so powerful in the city in ten years.” He continued. “Eyes are already on us, waiting for us to trip up. Both in business and here the vultures are already circling. This has to go right.”

His eyes lingered on Ranboo for a few moments, a little apologetic but still heavy with the weight of the burden Lethe would have to carry to see this through. Ranboo accepted it with a slight incline of his head, dark eyes solemn.

“Anyway, Wilbur, Techno.” Kristin held out two files. “That’ll be everyone at the party, Phil tells me you know most of them but there’s a few new faces to memorise.”

They began to talk amongst themselves about strategies and targets and Tommy began to zone them out. He spun around on his chair aimlessly, playing a game on his phone. Niki came back in after a while, sitting in the corner to listen in.

Wilbur edged over to her, escaping the discussion. They talked for a little while, before something he said caused her expression to change and he leaned closer, immediately nosy.

“I won’t get involved.” Niki said, raising her voice a little bit without meaning to. “I told you.”

“Unless it’s strictly necessary, I know.” Wilbur lowered his voice. “I’m not asking as a leader of the Syndicate Niki, I’m asking as a friend. I need to know where you’ll be when the fighting starts.”

“Starts? It’s already started.” She turned to look him in the eyes. “You and I both know we’ve been on different sides of that front line for years.”

“Whatever we find in that vault...”

“And what if it’s nothing. What if it’s already gone?” She hissed. “What if we send the boys in there for nothing or worse, they get hurt or captured or injured for nothing.”

“Don’t you believe in us?” His tone was light-hearted, but he clearly already knew, this was an old argument

“I’ve fought for plenty of men who have told me they are the solution.” She told him. “And it’s too late, I can’t change your mind and I certainly can’t change theirs.” Tommy averted his eyes quickly, pretending to play with a rubix cube left on the desk. He didn’t dare look up to try and guess if they’d noticed him

“Will.” Phil motioned for him to come back to the table, looking a little frustrated

“On it!” He turned back to Niki. “Well? Aren’t you going to wish me luck.” Niki looked him up and down, and then patted his shoulder.

“Don’t die.” It seemed sincere at least. Wilbur accepted it with a slight incline of his head, before sliding back to the table, hunched over. A little while passed, before there was a whisper of air by Tommy’s ear.

“Don’t you know it’s rude to listen in.” Tommy near jumped out of his skin, spinning around guiltily. Wilbur looked down at him.

“I know you were.”

“I’m bored.” Tommy said shortly.

“Fair enough. Phil’s trying to keep us busy so we don’t go stir crazy but he’s got a very boring way of doing it.” Wilbur agreed. “Still, helps to have everything set out again so everyone’s clear on plans.”

“What are you going to do?”

“Oh me? I’m going to get very drunk.” He said cheerfully

“I didn’t know you drink.”

“I don’t!” He declared. “But they think I do. It’s not hard to convince drunk people that you’re also drunk. But I have secrets I don’t need people knowing and...” He shuddered dramatically. “Can you imagine my powers when I’m drunk.”

Tommy mulled that over for a little bit. “Isn’t it hard? Being on alert like that all the time.”

“Is it hard, asking stupid questions all the time.” Wilbur’s eyes were sparkling with mischief. He jabbed him in the stomach in retort, and he doubled over, groaning. “That’s not fair. Of course it’s hard idiot, we never know when something will go wrong. Even Phil can’t plan for everything.”

“How do we know this is going to work?”

“You heard Phil. The amount of Enforcers they’re putting on the streets right now isn’t sustainable, the system they’re running isn’t sustainable.” Wilbur emphasised each point with a dramatic hand

motion. "After the hospital, after the fires, after the leaked footage that showed it was Enforcers that set them, they have been helping us pull the pins. We have been showing them that rebellion is possible. All we need is one more pin, and their game collapses. I believe that pin is the name of whoever Schlatt wants dead so badly he went to his loose end to do it."

"And if it's not?"

"I want to believe it is. I'm okay with being disappointed, we can try again. We're so close now." There was a kind of fervour in the older boy's eyes that both scared and intrigued Tommy, a depth of passion and emotion in the cause that drew him in, and without even realising he leaned closer to hear what he had to say.

"Is it ever going to be over? What if it's not enough?"

"One day it'll be over. Either we win or we die but it'll be over."

"What if you get caught?"

Wilbur's eyes flickered with something he couldn't quite read. "I'd rather die than face whatever miserable existence Schlatt has planned for us in Pandora. There is no getting caught, not for us." He reached out, putting a firm hand on Tommy's shoulder. "I've told you before and I'll tell you again, nothing will happen to you. They'll take you over my dead body."

He shivered at the thought. "Promise me it won't come to that." No answer. "Please."

"I can't make that promise, you know I can't." He almost sounded apologetic. "I failed once and I paid for it with the person I loved most, I won't let it happen again with anyone I care about."

"You care about me?" He tried to say it as a joke but his voice cracked a little. Wilbur nodded solemnly, tightening the hand on his shoulder a little in a reassurance.

"We all do. I mean-." He sounded as if he was about to say something but was cut off by Kristin calling them from the other side of the room.

"Will, Tommy, we're leaving!" Wilbur jumped up. He grabbed the back of Tommy's chair and gave it a hefty shove towards the group on the far side, sending him flying across the floor to Niki, who stopped it with her foot, dragging him back.

"Niki's coming with us." Kristin told him, unphased. "Try not to run her over."

"Wait you're coming?"

Niki looked excited, eyes lit up. "Just to the house, nowhere else. It's the first time I've left Haven in a long time." She said wistfully. "I love it down here but I've missed the sky. Kristin asked me to do her makeup for the party." She lowered her voice, smiling. "I think she's just using it as an excuse to sneak me topside because she knows Phil would never tell her no."

Kristin flashed them a quick smile, clearly having heard them but saying nothing as they gathered around Ranboo.

The moment they were back in the house, everyone scattered, leaving him to his own devices for the most part. Niki and Kristin heading off chatting to each other intently, Wilbur and Techno sitting in

the lounge comparing notes on various dignitaries of the city before retreating to their respective rooms to get ready.

He tried to play a game but he couldn't engage himself, tried to watch a film but he was too restless, nothing was working. He ended up curled up in the lounge, reading and rereading old Archangel comics. He could hear voices upstairs and sometimes people would hurry past but the hustle of preparation passed him by in his little bubble.

All the same, the comics didn't feel right anymore, not with Phil right next door. The character on the page almost felt like a mockery of everything the older man had been through, but at the same time he'd grown up with them and he couldn't quite explain why they meant so much to him anymore.

Old documentaries were easier, he'd sit and scour them for any sign of Phil in the young man on the screen. An old ally of Archangels strode on screen, wearing a large blue cape and jacket and in this case, oversized joke sunglasses, a grin slapped on his face.

Major, he'd recognise him anywhere, the hero had an air of the dramatic and an oddly familiar northern accent, but he couldn't quite place where he'd heard his voice before.

"It's like our home videos." Wilbur's voice made him jump, before spinning around and glaring at him. He was all dressed up in a smart woollen longcoat and silk shirt, his hair tamed from its usual wild mess for once, even a flash of gold in one ear lobe.

He looked rich, and arrogant, and one look at Tommy's bewildered expression caused a smug smile to spread across his face. He spun around, pulling the coat out so it swung with him.

"I clean up alright don't I."

"Fuck you."

"Are you jealous, Tommy are you jealous." His tone was sing song and mocking, reaching out an arm to wrap around his shoulders. "You know I tried to talk Phil into letting you come along but it's a bit too much pressure."

"Well it's only your family invited." Tommy brushed him off. "You can't just sneak anyone into a fancy party."

"Eh, you know you're like a brother to me." Wilbur teased him. "I'm sure that'll do."

"Fuck you." He grumbled

"Awww Tommyyyyy." Wilbur wrapped his arm around the other boy's neck, not tight but firm enough to lock him into a headlock, dragging him down. Tommy was yelling and yanking at his sleeve trying to get him off to no avail. The older boy pulled him around the room cheerfully, wrestling him without care for his new clothes or anything at all, shoving each other into the sofa to loud shrieks of protest.

Ranboo was much more reserved, rubbing his arm nervously as he paced back and forth. He made a beeline for Techno as soon as the elder came down, about to open his mouth to ask something but Techno cut him off with a head shake.

“You’ll be fine.”

“Right.” Ranboo drew the word out in the most unconvincing way possible.

Techno grasped his wrists, stopping him in his tracks before he could resume his pacing again. “It’s everything we’ve trained you for. You’ll be alright.”

“Yeah stop wearing holes in the carpet.” Wilbur called over but was promptly ignored.

“You sure I can handle this?”

“Wouldn’t have suggested this if I didn’t. Probably wouldn’t have suggested it even if I did but desperate times, desperate measures and all that.” He swung a cream wool coat over his suit, checking the strap of a very expensive watch around his wrist, suddenly the perfect image of the son of a businessman, far too young for the wealth he was displaying so openly.

Phil followed after him, wearing his favourite dark emerald suit over a black shirt, a more elaborate cane than his usual clutched in one hand, the hilt a dark crows head.

Kristin was last, in a beautiful indigo gown, her hair and makeup simple but elegant. She looked better than he’d ever seen her, with a glow in her cheeks and a spring in her step Tommy had never seen before. She turned her gaze on the two boys with a slightly amused expression

“Will, let him go.” He complied with a groan of protest, and Tommy sprung free, glaring daggers at him

“How did I do?” Niki appeared from behind her, smiling brightly. Phil’s expression said enough, somewhere between starstruck and speechless, before shifting to something a little more mischievous. He held one arm out, bowing slightly.

“My lady.”

“I’ll whack you over the head with your own cane if you call me that again.” She threatened, before sighing, laying on the dramatic a little. “Let’s get this over and done with.”

She turned to Tommy, sitting down next to him on the couch. “You take care of Ranboo, alright? He’s a little nervous.”

“I will, I promise.” He said solemnly. Her expression changed to one of pride, and she gathered him into a tight embrace. He clung onto her, wary of disturbing her makeup but she didn’t seem to care.

“Don’t get hurt.” He whispered.

“We’ve been doing this for years,” Phil reassured him. “We’ll be alright.”

He pulled away from her, looking up. “Promise?”

Phil hesitated for a moment, before reaching forward, pulling Tommy into a hug of his own before he could lose his nerve. The younger boy jumped in surprise, but he didn’t fight it, leaning against him.

“I promise.” He said solemnly

“The car’s here.” Kristin prompted him softly, a little unwilling to break the moment apart but there was nothing that could be done. Time was outrunning them and so he let Phil go, retreating to the corner as they fussed over the last few details, Kristin straightening Wilbur’s collar, heading out onto the porch.

He watched from the window as a man in a full chauffeurs outfit jumped out, holding the doors open for them, how Phil and his son’s demeanors changed to calm, indifferent, as if the luxury came naturally to them, though he knew that couldn’t be further from the truth.

It was like seeing through new eyes, they were the same people he met for the first time at the Sponsors ball, but the figures in the window weren’t the Watsons he knew at all. A kind of pride kindled in his stomach as the car slid away, gliding under the glow of the streetlights, the sun beginning to set.

There was no fear on their faces as they walked into a vipers nest, unarmed and with no one at their back except each other. How naturally Kristin had slipped into the same, it was like she had always been one of the Syndicate. In a way, he supposed she had.

He slid down from his seat, drawing himself up. “Is that it then?”

Ranboo had already vanished into the kitchen, rattling around bowls and spoons. Niki gave him a sympathetic look as they followed. “What did you think it would be.”

A shrug. “I don’t know. Thought there would be some big fanfare or something. Seems like it should be a little more dramatic.”

“Just another day of work.” Ranboo said from inside the fridge. He shut it, looking a little pale. “I don’t know if I can eat anything right now.” He admitted. “I’ll have something later.”

“Are you going to be okay?” She asked kindly.

“I’ll be alright, when I’m there I get in the zone but right now it’s just nerves.” He made a quick exit from the room. Niki sighed.

“How strange it all is.” She sat herself down at the table. “Who would have thought we’d end up here.”

That drew a rueful laugh. “I’m so stressed for them this isn’t right. I’m supposed to be stressed because of them.”

“You’re alive, I’m alive and that’s what counts.” She said simply.

“What are you going to do?”

She held up a bag in her hand. “I bought some sewing and stuff to do. I have my old Tsunami suit, I’ve nearly fixed it, just a few bits and pieces to keep me busy.”

“How long are you staying?”

She pondered that for a moment. “I think overnight, and then I’ll go back in the morning. I’ll be in the spare room if you need me.”

The radio chattered away in the background, filling in a little bit of the silence as Tommy sat down to eat, poking at the leftover shepherd’s pie on the counter dubiously.

Ranboo excused himself to go get ready, leaving him behind in the empty kitchen. He pulled his earpiece out of his pocket, clipping it in, watching the other boy leave with a pensive expression.

Every attempt at distracting himself ended in pacing restlessly around the room, heart in his throat. The radio began drilling into his brain, cluttering an already full mind so he shut it off, slamming the volume button with an unusual amount of aggression.

Now there was just the silence to keep him company, broken only by the ticking of the grandfather clock in the hallway, and the occasional thud from upstairs. Niki had a pair of headphones on in the corner, giving him his space while she worked on her projects.

It felt helpless. His mother was at the party playing games to keep him safe, Phil and his sons were risking everything just for information, Ranboo was about to put his life on the line for the Syndicate and here he was, doing nothing at all.

He gathered up his nerve, knocking on the door of the guest bedroom.

“Come in.”

Ranboo was sat on the bed, wrestling with a coil of climbing rope he was clipping onto his belt. He glanced up briefly but was mostly preoccupied. Streetlights siphoned in through the window now darkness had fallen fully, filtered in between gaps in the curtains

“I’m coming with you.” Tommy said finally, after a slight hesitation. There was a moment of shock on Ranboo’s face, and then it cleared with resolve

“We can’t change the plan this last minute. Absolutely not.”

“You heard them, if this goes wrong there’s no one to save you.”

“And you could?” The question seemed genuine, but Tommy glared at him anyway

“If it comes down to it, yes. I want to help, I can’t just stay here.”

“Help the Syndicate? That’s not very....Tommy of you.” Ranboo’s tone was teasing but a little curious

“Well, maybe it’s Icarus of me, or whatever they want to call me now. But I’m not leaving you behind.”

He shook his head again. “Lethe works alone. I can’t risk it.” Tommy moved a little closer, arms folded.

“You weren’t working alone when we burned down Eret’s shop.”

“When you burned down Eret’s shop.” He was promptly corrected. “I was just a bystander.”

“We’re a team,” Tommy argued. “Isn’t that how we work? I can’t sit here and do nothing while you’re out there working.”

“Tommy-.”

“You’ve never won a fight against me.” He pressed. “I always win, you know I’ll win.”

“Kristin would kill me.” Ranboo sounded pleading this time, as if he knew he would cave under the pressure eventually. “Why does it matter that much.”

“I’ve just got a bad feeling about this.” He explained a little awkwardly. “I don’t know why. Besides, you said it yourself it’ll be in and out, I probably won’t have to do anything. Right?”

“Does Niki know?” Tommy’s expression said it all. “You can’t sneak out past her.”

“I can.” He said stubbornly.

“Fine.” Ranboo caved after a long while, though it was easier than he’d expected. In fact the other boy almost looked relieved that he didn’t have to go alone and for a moment, just a moment, they both felt like children again, working in a world much too big for them. “I’ll probably get killed for this but fine, you can come with, but you have to stay outside and hidden. You can only come in if something goes wrong, which it won’t, but only then.”

He could settle for that. He could tell by the other’s suddenly unusually determined expression there was no hope of getting anything more than that.

“Deal.”

“Then wrap up, it’s cold out.” He dug in his bag. “Proper boots.” Ranboo tossed them over, followed by a small knife. “Switchblade, it always comes in handy.”

“For...what.”

“Not for stabbing people, if that’s what you’re thinking.” He corrected himself quickly. “But if it comes to that.” He paused a little. “Well Phil always says to me rather than you. Do you have your phone?”

Tommy nodded. “That’s staying here right.”

“Earpiece only, we can’t have anything tracking us.” Ranboo agreed. He was in full work mode now, using helping Tommy as a way to ease the anxiety. The awkward, anxious boy he knew was transformed into an efficient,

“Rooftops have less chance of CCTV, they don’t ever expect someone to break in that way because well, people can’t generally teleport to a rooftop. So here.” He pointed out the top of an office building opposite the bank. “That’s where you can be, you’ll see everything, and you’re nearby.”

He took a long look at the map, committing as much of it as possible to memory as he pulled on some more practical clothes, snatching Techno-...his leather jacket off the chair, the weight of it comforting against what he was about to do, mouth dry with anticipation.

“You know, most of the city is scared of you.” He said, handing the map back to Ranboo

“If this is you trying to lighten the mood it’s terrible.”

“Ghost of the Syndicate and it’s two freaking teenagers in a room on the other side of the city.”

“They’ll never know.” The last thing Tommy saw before the Lethe mask closed over his face was a satisfied smile. “Ready?”

Tommy pulled up his mask and held his hand out. “Ready as I’ll ever be.”

They teleported into thin air, dropping a little bit before hitting the ground, Tommy missing his step and tripping. He almost fell flat on his face but managed to tuck himself into a roll and get back on his feet. Lethe adjusted his mask nervously, taking a deep breath. “Miscalculated that a bit.”

“You don’t say.” Tommy dusted himself off.

“Stay here. If anything goes wrong, don’t try anything until I tell you to, chances are I can just run away.”

“Got it.”

Lethe ran towards the edge of the rooftop and jumped, plummeting towards the streets below before vanishing in a tiny flash of purple particles. Tommy clutched his chest dramatically even though no one could see

“You bastard.” He muttered. “Doing that to little old me.”

“I’ve always wanted to do that.” Ranboo sounded a little pleased with himself, before turning serious again. “Alright. Here we go.”

Silence fell, and he began to count the cars on the street below, like counting sheep but for anxiety instead of sleep. It was about as effective as the sheep, which is to say, not at all. The moonless night wasn’t helping his nerves, the sky shrouded in a thick layer of clouds.

A wind blew up from the north, edged with a bite of frost that sent goosebumps up his spine. He dug his fingers into the stone for an anchor

“I’m in.”

“All clear?”

“All clear.” He agreed. “Sniff’s informant was right, security isn’t as high as it should be.”

“This almost feels too easy.”

“Not a word.” Ranboo hissed. “You’ll jinx it.”

There were slight pauses between Ranboo’s reply, the older boy distracted. Tommy reached for his phone forgetting he had to leave it behind before resorting to flicking pebbles off the wall, kicking his feet.

“When did it get this bad.” He said without really meaning it.

“Huh? Bad? It’s that bad is it?”

“I’m running missions for the Syndicate while working in the Agency, yes it’s bad R-Lethe.”

“I’m doing the same.”

“Exactly!” He threw his hands up in triumph. “I’m right.”

“Hey you forgot to include the bank robbery.” Lethe added, amused. “Don’t forget the bank robbery.”

He groaned, sinking down. “Don’t make it worse.”

“At least it’s quiet.” There was a soft jingle on Ranboo’s end and he paused for a moment. “I like working on quiet nights.” He added. “The world slows down for a bit.”

“It’s alright for some.” Tommy muttered. “Hope you enjoy your quiet bank robbery.”

“Go run around the city or something, I’ll be fine.”

“We’re literally wanted.” Tommy said flatly. “I’m not going anywhere in a Syndicate get up I don’t want to get shot. Again.”

“Thanatos did say we needed to start getting out and getting seen. But yes, probably best you do it with me.” Ranboo concluded. “I was thinking we could…”

There was a sudden, sharp gasp, and then silence.

“Lethe?” He asked warily.

“I think I was spotted.” There was a tiny tremor in the other boy’s voice, but he veiled it quickly with a cool professionalism. Tommy did no such thing, scrambling to his feet in a hurry.

“What do I need to do.”

“Nothing, you stay where you are.” Lethe ordered. “I’m sure it’s fine. This was always going to be the riskiest bit, getting into the security office and out.” A long silence, maybe two, three minutes but it felt longer.

A sudden, sharp blaring noise cut through the earpiece, ringing up from the streets below.

“The alarms are going off. God freaking damn it.” It was the closest Tommy had ever heard him come to swearing, the tension strung through his voice.

The blaring ringing in the background was rising. “Drop out, it’s not worth it.” He begged. “Get out of there.”

“Negative.” Ranboo’s voice sounded strained. “We won’t get another chance like this again, I can’t let them down.”

“You can, please you can, we need you!”

There was another pause. "I engaged the sprinkler system so it overrides the spotlights they use to find intruders, they do that to preserve energy in case of a fire." Ranboo told him. "There's still a chance."

He could hear heavy breathing and footsteps. Then there were raised voices, sudden rushed movements and shouts, and grunts of effort. It sounded like a fight but he was helpless to stop it, helpless to do anything but listen. An abrupt cry of pain and the sound cut. Tommy shot up.

"Lethe. Lethe!" No reply. Nothing. "Lethe!"

Only static greeted him. "You answer me right now or I'm barging in there to get you myself." The silence was worse than anything he'd ever heard. "Ten, nine, eight, seven, six..." He began running towards the edge of the building. "Five, four, three." He checked his gear, making sure everything was secure. "Two. One."

There wasn't any time to hesitate, he knew that, and Tommy was never one to overthink his actions much. Icarus ran, Icarus jumped and Icarus fell, plummeting through the night sky. The ground rushed closer and closer but the heights didn't scare him anymore.

He squeezed his hands tight shut to hide the light of his powers as his fall levelled out, catching himself moments before he landed and gliding down to the road, hitting the ground running. He hurled himself up towards a window at the side, throwing himself at it with all his strength. The glass shattered away from him, and he burst into the foyer.

It was dark, droplets raining down from the sprinkler system on the ceiling. The marbled floor was slick with water, the little booths where the bank tellers would sit during the day empty.

There was no sign of Lethe. He began scanning the room, pushing aside chairs and tables, running towards the exit at the back. Panic was starting to set in despite himself, the blaring alarm digging into his skull, flashing lights burning his eyes. He'd gone in with no plan at all, lost and confused.

At the last minute his earpiece crackled. "I'm here." Ranboo's voice sounded much weaker. "I got cornered, I got away."

The relief nearly made him sink to the floor. "Are you...?"

"They got a lucky hit in, smacked me across the head." He could hear the edge of tears in the other boy's voice. "I can't see straight, give me a second."

"I'm inside the lobby."

"Tommy no!"

"No names, your rules." Tommy shot back. "Where are you?"

"Go, don't let them see you."

"I thought you were dead." He hissed.

“Did you just run in?”

Tommy stared at the ceiling, unable to stop a slight rueful smile tugging across his face. “Maybeeee.”

“Go through the door, third on the left. Run, they’re searching everywhere.” Came the weary reply

He shoved it open, closing it quickly behind him and dragging a plant pot in front of it as a makeshift barrier, looking around. It was a plain, basic office, a computer in the corner, a pile of paper by the shredder, completely windowless.

A pinboard in the corner had some intricate charts he didn’t understand, the whole place smelling like air freshener. Lethe was leant against the wall, one hand pressed against his temple. He looked tired, head hanging to one shoulder. Tommy pushed his mask up just a little to help him breathe, checking his pulse automatically. Ranboo brushed his hand away, trying to sit up.

“You look pale.”

“You idiot.” He whispered, clawing at his sleeve. “They have snipers in security, you could have gotten killed.” A chill ran down Tommy’s spine.

“No one gets left behind.” He said firmly. “We gotta go.”

“No.” Lethe sat forward. “No I’m not done.”

“What the hell do you mean you’re not done, it’s over, they know and you’re injured, we have to go now.”

“This is our only chance. If we get away Schlatt will know why we’re here, we can’t just throw this chance away.”

“They’ll catch us, and they’ll fucking drag us to Pandora or kill us.” Tommy hissed, heart pounding in his chest. He kept glancing back at the door, trying to see if anyone was coming. “And they’ll make a big fucking spectacle out of it, Lethe and some idiot caught at the scene of the crime, the end of the Syndicate, whatever you want, and they’ll find the others too.”

Lethe quietened. “I’m not scared of Pandora.” He pulled himself to his feet, one hand against the wall for support “I can escape, right. I did it before, getting out of Allium I can do it again.”

“Not Pandora you can’t.” Tommy whispered. “Don’t lie to me, you know I hate being lied to.”

“I think I’m lying to myself too.” He admitted, just as softly.

“We didn’t burn down Eret’s shop just to end up the same way they did.”

“We didn’t burn down that shop to let the chance to bring the Enforcers to justice slip. We can finish what Eret started.” Ranboo said firmly. “I can finish what Orpheus and Achilles started, I can’t fail them now. You can go, this isn’t your fight.”

He grabbed Ranboo's arm, forcing him around to face him. "Am I one of you or not? Don't try and fuckin' coddle me. I said I'm in for the ride and I meant it."

"You're my best friend. I can't be the reason something happens to you." He hissed. Tommy grabbed his sleeve, pulling him along.

"Nothing is going to happen to us. Now tell me everything I need to know, quickly."

"Staff courtyard forward and to the left, staffroom to the right, offices straight ahead, 8 of them. Most offices are on the second floor, guard room on the other side of the courtyard, the secure area is downstairs, we're looking for one of the first ones on the right if the information Persephone told us is true, either way we'll be able to find it by the numbers and..." He reeled it off from memory without missing a beat.

"That's all I need. Now we move!"

He yanked him to his feet and plunged into danger once again, without time to think about fear. The darkness was oppressive, but it was also their salvation, the flashlights the security guards were using to search the halls giving them away long before they arrived. It was a tiny advantage but every second counted. A beam of light hit the wall on the far side, and Lethe froze.

There were no rooms to hide in, nothing except a large cupboard at the side of the corridor. Tommy yanked it open, grabbing Ranboo by the back of the collar and yanking him inside next to him, pulling the door shut. They froze in place, pressed against brooms and bottles of cleaning liquid, barely squeezing in.

The door didn't quite close. He hung onto it, knuckles white from the effort. Feet ran past outside; he counted three or four at least. Raised voices rang out, and then they were gone again.

He'd stopped breathing, too afraid they'd hear the sound. A gasped lungful of air, and then he shoved his way out.

"And now we go." Not even a glance to see if they'd been spotted, their pace fuelled by adrenaline.

"Go back go back." Another beam of light. They ducked into a different corridor, weaving in and out with no particular direction, just away, anywhere where searchlights didn't follow them.

Tommy drew to a sudden halt at a junction of corridors. "We've been here before." Tommy said heavily. "Fuck."

"Where are we going?"

"You tell me." Tommy said grimly. "I'm trying to throw them off any trail you left."

"Left." Lethe ordered. "Then right." He acted almost on instinct. His legs were burning but he didn't dare stop, blindly throwing himself forward. They came up to a set of doors, held closed by an elaborate security lock but it was dull, the power clearly shut off. When he tested it, the door just slid open.

"We're in luck." Lethe said. "I disabled this earlier, wasn't sure if they'd got it back online." He yanked the door open, closing it behind them. "Second right, and then down. We're close now."

“You mean we could have run into a dead end?”

“It was a risk I had to take.”

The sprinklers hadn't been turned off still. The water slid off his leather jacket, but it was seeping into his neck and down his hands, ice sliding down his spine. He turned another corner right by the stairs down, dodging into the next room, pressing his back against the wall.

His throat was tight, chest heaving, he didn't seem to be able to get enough air in. He clawed at his mask without thinking, trying to pull it away so he could breathe.

“Icarus!”

A hand closed around his wrist, grounding him. There were flashes behind his eyes, images of a similar scene weeks ago, running for his life down the halls of a warehouse, gunshot wound and all. Oh, how times had changed, and yet he still felt like he was hanging on the edge, talking his way out of a ticket to the underworld.

Or maybe it was the Greek mythology shit getting to his head. He'd blame Techno, that sounded like a good idea, he'd yell at him later. If he got out alive

“We've been here before, haven't we.” Lethe's blank mask stared back at him, but he could imagine Ranboo's expression behind it, the kind of grim weariness he wore on his own, clinging onto each other like a lifeline.

“That's what I was thinking.”

“No backup coming, just us and a bunch of people who want to kill us.” His tone was bleak. “But we got out of it last time.”

“We didn't make it.” Tommy pressed his head into his hands. “We wasted our chance.”

“I told you, I can't fail.”

“We have to teleport.”

“The moment we do, the game will be up.” He replied. “Like you said, it won't take them long to put the dots between you and me, the Agency will get involved, and they'll go after the family. And I don't trust myself to land us safely right now.” He admitted. “I. I think I've got a concussion.”

“Shit.” He said slowly. “What does that do to the teleport?”

“It means I don't trust myself to jump. I need perfect concentration and if I don't have that, we end up in a wall, in the dirt, we're dead before we realise what happened.”

Tommy swore again, a string of colourful language that would have put a sailor to shame, trying to block out the image of a slow death far below the earth, somewhere where no one would ever find him. “We'll find a way.” He promised. “Don't worry, we'll find a way out, I swear. I'll get you out of here, you're not going to die today.”

Ranboo looked at the floor, a little ashamed. “Niki thinks you’re asleep.”

Tommy paled. “She needs to know.”

“She’ll murder us.” He said wryly

“Better her than them. She can get word to the others.” He steadied his breathing a little, taking count of their surroundings. It looked like some kind of storage room, piled high with paper and files. It was so very ordinary and here they were, looking like something straight out of a heist movie. The thought made him laugh, cold and tired and scared for his life.

“Niki?” Lethe said softly over their earpieces. “Niki please say you’re there.”

“Is everything okay?” His silence was enough. “Lethe, what happened.”

“It’s gone wrong, we don’t know if we’ll make it out.” He told her. “Icarus is inside with me.”

“Icarus is... You’re kidding me.”

“I’m sorry,” Ranboo said automatically. “He was just going to stay outside, just in case, he wasn’t backing down and if he hadn’t I’d probably be dead right now but-.”

“I’ve got you. Everything is going to be okay.” Her voice was gentle, it was the same tone she’d used whenever they’d been on a dangerous assignment, coaxing him out of his shell, reassuring him everything was going to be alright even as a much younger Tommy walked into gunfire. It almost brought him to tears. “I’ve known him for a long time I know what he’s like. I’m glad you’re not alone but doesn’t matter now. Tell me what to do.”

“I don’t know,” Lethe whispered. “The others are busy and they can’t leave. Just... Wanted you to know. Say goodbye I guess.”

“No.” Her voice was steel. “This isn’t a goodbye.” There was a pause. “I’m calling Persephone, stay with me.” Niki told them both. “We’ll get you out of there I swear.”

“I don’t know if it’s possible,” Tommy said bleakly

“Never say never.”

“Niki please.” She fell silent. “Tell them I love them. If we don’t make it.” Tommy echoed his agreement to Ranboo’s words quietly. “That’s all I ask.” He could hear the tears in her voice.

“And they love you both too, we all do, don’t ever forget it. Stay where you are, help is coming, we can save y...” He switched his earpiece off abruptly, footsteps suddenly right outside the door. His heart was in his throat, glancing over at Lethe. The other boy gripped his hand, a meager source of strength in the darkness.

They shrunk down behind a stack of boxes, Ranboo curling up into a ball, trying to make himself as small as possible. The door creaked open, and everything seemed to slow down as a security guard stepped in, a bright flashlight in hand, scanning the room slowly. It inched closer and closer. Tommy felt as if he was going to be sick, readying for a fight.

It passed over them, he could have sworn she should have seen them but somehow they managed to blend into the darkness. By some miracle she turned away, the door shut. His hands were clenched so tight he didn't think he could uncurl his fingers anymore

“Hannah! Anything?”

“Nothing.” The guard sounded frustrated. “They must have headed back.” The footsteps began to fade away, and he slid down, suddenly weak, going limp. Ranboo looked in a similar state, his lip bitten close to drawing blood.

“We need to move. Now.”

“We’re running in circles trying to escape them, we’re not going anywhere like this.” Tommy said in a hushed but frantic whisper

“We’re nearly there.” Ranboo argued. “Just a little further.”

He wasn’t listening. As the footsteps turned the corner his mind was already made up. “I’ll buy time.”

Ranboo’s head snapped around, Lethe’s empty mask staring at him. “Don’t even…”

“I’ll distract them, I can get away, you need to finish the mission before more Enforcers arrive.”

“We can’t split up, we won’t be able to get out.”

Tommy took a step away. “We don’t have any other choice. I’ll meet you in the foyer, you do whatever you have to.”

“Don’t do this.” He begged. “I need you.”

“Whatever it takes, we need to finish the mission.” Tommy parroted back at him. He didn’t give him time to reply, yanking Eryn’s lighter out of his pocket. He knelt down by the paper in the corner, holding the flame to it. “I’ve got this.”

Brave, reckless Tommy, Wilbur had said and he’d be damned if he wouldn’t live up to that. Of course, Wilbur said some other things as well, but he was choosing to ignore them right now for the ones that would give him the most steel for what he was about to do. Fire caught fire, just like he’d done before, but the stakes were so much higher this time.

“Don’t die,” Lethe said softly. “Don’t you dare die.”

“I won’t, I won’t, just get out of here before the smoke spreads.” Lethe’s footsteps faded into the distance and Tommy split the other way, muffling the sound of his movements as best he could. The fire alarms began to ring anew, and he could hear a fresh round of panic, now centred on the one room.

The blaze caught onto the dry paper fast but he knew it wouldn’t last. The same trick never worked as well twice, but all he needed it to do was done, a haze of smoke clouded the corridor Lethe had gone

down, shrouding even the flashlights the security guards carried.

He could hear what sounded like police sirens outside. He hunched down behind a shelf, tapping his earpiece. "Lethe?"

"I know, I hear them too," Ranboo replied, his voice tight. "It wasn't going to be long after the alarms went off."

"How are you doing?"

"I'm nearly there. I just need a little longer. Got any more distractions?"

"I might have one." He replied. "Just the one though."

"Do it. I'll meet you when I'm done."

"Got it." He hoped Ranboo didn't hear his voice waver on the last bit. He rose to his feet, tailing a figure he'd seen down the corridor to where he stood at the end, standing guard, facing the other way.

It was an Enforcer this time, not just a guard, or police. The ram's head on his shoulder glinted from the light of the dying flame as they were quenched, leaving him as a shadow in the smoke. Tommy's heart began to race, the scene eerily similar to one in the wreckage of the hospital and the very thought filled him with a kind of fury he didn't know he had.

He turned the corner, swinging his hand up towards the Enforcer. Fist collided with bone as the Enforcer's jaw snapped to the side and he did it again, and again, fuelled by some source of rage and desperation he wasn't even quite aware he'd tapped into. The Enforcer staggered back but he was shouting already

Tommy took off at a run, dodging around the corner, shoving the door open into the courtyard Ranboo had mentioned, backing away towards the far wall. It was a dull thing, gravel and concrete with a few wilted plants on the walls, clearly a little neglected, but he wasn't here for the view.

There was a dull sinking feeling in his chest as he watched the doors, waiting for them to burst through. He knew he'd lied, he knew this was a dead end, he had no plans to get out but this time it was his choice. He wasn't backed into a corner against his will, he wasn't running for his life, he'd walked into the danger, he'd placed himself here.

This time it was his decision, however empty that felt. An illusion of choice sounded better than anything he had right now, and if that choice saved Ranboo it was one he was willing to make

The Enforcer ran in after him but he was ready, scooping up a handful of gravel from the ground and throwing it at his face to distract him, punching him in the stomach with all his strength.

Techno's training coming into its own at last as he forced him into close quarters, giving his opponent no time to draw his weapon, the only chance he had at winning. Every spar with Niki, every raw inch of anger poured into this, fighting a grown man bigger and stronger than he was and gaining ground.

This wasn't some fair fight, all skillful and elegant. This was a desperate scrabble for survival, and he really didn't know who was winning, every hit bruising, fingers clawing for his throat. The Enforcer

had a knife in his hand, Tommy didn't remember when he drew it, he was barely parrying it away, the rush of adrenaline fading.

"Backup! I need backup at..." Tommy smacked his radio out of his hand, stomping his heel on it as hard as he could to grind it into the gravel. Something slammed into his chest and he staggered back, winded. He threw his hands up, trying to retaliate but it was too late. The Enforcer snatched his gun off his back, swinging it up to point at him.

"Hands in the air or I shoot!" There was nothing he could do. Nothing he wanted to do. He knew this was coming the moment he spoke the words that split him from Lethe, sent him running down this path to whatever end. He took another step back, letting his head drop. "I won't tell you again!"

Icarus raised his hands to the sky.

"On your knees." He was trembling now but he didn't let it show. He wouldn't give them that victory as he sunk to the ground. The cold night air seared his lungs with every raw breath he dragged in. He tilted his head back and stared up at the sky, battling the tears in his eyes.

A hand slammed against his back, throwing him to the floor. His cheek collided with the ground with a dull thud. The Enforcer's smile was ice cold as his hands were forced behind his back, cold metal closing around his wrists, followed by that now familiar feeling of chills running down his spine, like the warmth was sucked out of his soul.

"We don't have Lethe yet, but we have his accomplice." He could hear the radio chatter above his head, sirens in the distance but it made no sense to him, his head ringing. The door swung open and a security guard walked through, wearing a bulletproof vest, gun in hand, sealing any last hope of being able to escape the lone Enforcer.

The man in question didn't take his eyes off Icarus as they spoke, their words too hushed to understand what they were saying.


All that time and he was here again, back at the inevitable end. A gun trade in downtown, a raid on a bookshop, running for his life, an Enforcers hand on his throat. It all came back around.


No matter how far he went, no matter what side he was on, the same forces breathed down his neck. He refused to be afraid of them, but that didn't stop the pounding in his chest, didn't stop the tears gathering in his eyes. Icarus had fallen, and there was no one there to catch him.

He closed his eyes and prayed to a god who'd never answered, prayed that his best friend would forgive him, that Kristin would be safe, that Wilbur wouldn't cry when he lost another brother, that it would all be over soon and after all these years he could finally rest

Ahaha, maybe the fluff was misleading. I hope you liked it, I was very nervous posting this chapter. Anyway the next update will be in a weeks time, on WHT's 1st birthday. That's right, this fic is one year old on the 1st of January!

As always, thank you so much for all the love and support, and remember to let me know or tag me if you post any art under the whtfanart hashtag on twitter, write any fics inspired by it, you can tag my tiktok account in any tiktoks you post and I will do my best to promote them all. Anyway, this weeks featured art is from the discord!

 Art by the amazing Petrikoral

 Art by the incredible Saridlin

Chapter 63

Chapter Notes

Happy one year Welcome Home Theseus (as of the 1st of January, but I'm a little late with the anniversary update). Check the end notes once you're done for a big announcement

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

The cold seeped into his skin, his jacket soaked through from the sprinklers, now turning icy without the warmth from movement. He could hear a helicopter in the distance, the chattering coming closer. His face was pressed into the gravel, suddenly bone tired. It felt so easy to just lie there, no escape and no more running. A little voice in the back of his head berated him for it but he was so weary of listening to it.

An impact and a muffled yell. He froze, as if that would somehow save him. A hand closed around his wrists, and he almost screamed before they clicked free.

He looked up, mouth already forming Ranboo's name. It wasn't Ranboo that looked back at him. The woman from the storeroom, the one he could have sworn had seen him was stood over him with an impatient expression on her face, flicking her hair out of the way. "Get up."

He scrambled to his feet, staggering back a little as he tried to gain an idea of his surroundings. Over in the corner of the courtyard lay the Enforcer in a crumped heap, completely still. "What the-."

"He's just unconscious." She was already moving back to him, stripping the rams head off his shoulder, taking his phone, his gun, his security pass.

"Who are you?" Tommy asked, bewildered.

"Hannah. You're injured." He looked down and nearly screamed. There was a deep gash down his calf, the shock clearly masking the pain at first but now he'd seen it he couldn't ignore it, like a hot iron against his skin.

"Oh what the-." She tore the Enforcers sleeve right off, wrapping it tightly around the wound.

"That'll do for now." She snatched the knife up off the floor and wiped it off on the fabric, pressing it into his hand. "No blood. No traces, they will find you."

He held a hand out awkwardly. "Thank you. I'm..."

"Don't tell me." She said coldly. "Don't tell me anything at all. I don't want to know. And I know about your friend. He's trying to get into the vaults, he won't get past." She said confidently. "Their security protocol was activated, without executive permission it won't work."

"Fuck. We don't have that." She held up the Enforcers security badge, and her own.

"Yes we do."

His mouth hung open in such shock he barely questioned the sudden turn of events. “Why are you doing this?”

Her expression hardened a little. “Let’s say I have reasons to want payback and leave it at that.” He didn’t know what else to do, he followed, limping heavily. He didn’t even question if she could be trusted, still in the haze of acceptance, not quite convinced she wasn’t just leading him into another trap but not caring to question it.

“Lethe’s been here before, I wasn’t on shift last time luckily. They upped their security since then, kept it very quiet. Stay down. There’s cameras.” She grabbed his shoulder, pulling him down into a crouch with her. His calf screamed in protest as he did so and he bit his lip hard trying not to make a sound. She waited until the camera had turned a little, before yanking him up again without looking back, setting a punishing pace ahead.

He began to fall behind a little, struggling as they headed down once again, past where he’d left Lethe, down into the underground section of the bank.

“How far is it?”

“Just a little further.” She promised. “I used a staff shortcut.” They turned another corner into a wide hallway, leading up to a thick metal door, no windows or any weak points at all. The security panel on the door looked like it had been half unscrewed, a sign Lethe had been there, but he wasn’t now. She scanned up and down for any sign of Enforcers, before motioning for him to follow.

A shadow began to move behind her. He was too slow to realise what that meant. A flicker of black cloth and Lethe appeared behind Hannah, knife to her throat, head snapping to Tommy.

“No!” He dropped his voice, the echo startling him, hands held out trying to de-escalate the situation. “No. it’s okay, we can trust her. She helped me.” He didn’t move.

“Two people is dangerous, three will kill us.”

“Let her go.” He did so very slowly, the knife held tight in his fist. Hannah declined to even respond, simply getting up and striding over to the door. She pressed the Enforcer’s security badge against the scanner, and it went orange and then green as she added her own.

“Bingo.”

The doors slid open with a low rumble to reveal a large room. A row of grey steel safe boxes lined the room from tiled floor to ceiling. They seemed identical but Hannah didn’t stop, sweeping past them all. Their footsteps rang out in echoes across the room which did nothing to help the anxiety sitting in the pit of his stomach, shooting glances over his shoulder. The door slid shut again with a dull thud, and Lethe stiffened.

“Security protocol.” She said shortly. “If the doors open for too long it sets off alarms.”

“And it can be remotely locked.” He said stiffly. “I know.” She looked a little impressed

“You did come prepared.”

“I’ve done this before.”

“This one.” She stopped at one of the safety boxes, pressing her key against it, the lock turning green, springing open.

A small envelope sat in the middle, pitiful on the dark metal. They stared at it for a few beats.

“Is that it?” Tommy asked finally

“Is that what you were looking for?” Hannah asked, eyes on the entrance. Her knuckles were white on her gun despite her apparent calm, a strange intensity in her expression. Ranboo took it out, slipping the piece of paper out inside, eyes scanning over it for a second before shutting the door, turning to leave.

“We could make them think we didn’t get this far.” Tommy said suddenly. “It might throw them off our trail.”

“It doesn’t look like he’s touched it yet. If we can withhold it from him, we should.”

“I mean Schlatt will find a way to tell him.”

“Finger prints.” He explained. “Not worth the risk.”

“How do you think of all of this?” Lethe took a deep breath, giving him a look at might have been a weak smile behind his mask.

“Stops me thinking about other things.”

“All that for this.” Tommy said disbelievingly. It made it all feel pathetic now, that he’d been willing to lay down his life and freedom for a meagre scrap of paper. He didn’t really know what he’d expected, but it wasn’t this, but he supposed he should have.

“You take it.”

“Are you sure?”

“They’ll target me.” He reasoned. “The Lethe mask and all.”

“We could swap masks.”

“Absolutely not.” Hannah cut them off. “I don’t know if I turned all the surveillance off, it’s not worth it.”

Lethe held it out again, more insistently this time. “I trust you.” This time Tommy took it, tucking it inside his jacket. There was some weight behind that, Ranboo who always worked alone as Lethe, trusting Tommy with what could be the most important thing he ever did. He pressed his hand against it, the scrap of paper feeling very heavy all of a sudden.

“Very touching but we need to run.” Hannah’s voice echoed down the hall. “Unless you’ve changed your mind on getting out of here alive.”

He turned away, and Lethe grabbed his wrist, the blank mask turning to look at him. “She’s right. Don’t do anything stupid.”

“No promises.” Tommy said it as lightly as he could, but somehow he knew Lethe had put two and two together, from the limp and his sudden disappearance earlier, and reappearance with a security

guard it wasn't hard. Hannah held up her ID, and the vault door slid open again with its dull grinding thud. He breathed a silent sigh of relief.

"I'll meet you in the street, there's a door up top. Lethe knows it, he escaped by it last time." She told them, heading up the stairs in the opposite direction.

"Where are you going?"

"Got some personal business." She didn't elaborate, or look like she cared to, and Lethe didn't raise any protest to it either. They forged off a different corridor, Lethe leading the way but he was starting to struggle, slowing down a little.

Ranboo was slowing down. He sunk down in a shadowed corner, pressing a hand to his head. "A break?"

"We shouldn't."

"A minute won't hurt." He pleaded. "There's no one close."

Tommy knew he shouldn't, he knew it was a bad idea but he sat down anyway, letting the tension ease out from his shoulders just a little. And maybe it was reckless but so was everything they'd done and he wasn't ready for this. Besides, Ranboo looked worse for wear, head in his hands, in a kind of state he would never normally let himself be seen in when wearing the Lethe mask.

Tommy stuffed his hands in his pockets, trying to warm them a little. His fist closed around an object in his pocket. The keyring from the riots, the pair of black wings, the feathers cutting into his palm with how tightly he held it. He saw the woman who'd held it get dragged away, the cold faces of the Enforcers, he saw the other apprentices standing helplessly by, and suddenly a minute break felt meaningless, a stupid risk in the face of all that was at stake.

"No. Get up." Ranboo looked up at him a little blearily. "Get up, we gotta go."

"Just a little longer." He whined but Tommy was resolved now. The spark that was lit in the ashes of Eret's shop was burning and he didn't feel the pain in his leg anymore, driven by the sudden inexplicable need to survive.

"Now." He wrapped his hands around Ranboo's wrist, yanking him to his feet. "We'll rest when we're safe, okay?" That seemed to pull the other boy together just a little. He drove forward into the corridor, not even caring if they were seen at this point, making a beeline for the doorway at the end.

He grabbed the handle, but it stuck. The door was locked, and nothing he could do would budge it. The frame was metal, the door itself thick with only a tiny glass window at the very top.

The sound of distant marching boots was suddenly echoing down behind them, getting louder. His heart was racing. "They're coming."

"The hinges." Ranboo whispered. "They're the..."

"Weakest part of the door." Tommy recalled. "You used it to break into the warehouse, and I didn't even fucking question how you knew that."

That got him a weak white-toothed smile. "My bad."

“You fucker.” He looked around for any cameras, before pressing his hand against the frame. The metal warped, red light tearing it apart with an awful screeching noise. He slammed his shoulder into it and it shifted, before creaking open just a little. It was all they needed.

He staggered out into a narrow street, almost collapsing against the wall, the rush of adrenaline deserting him but the fear drove him on, grabbing Lethe’s arm and pulling him along.

“Keep going.” The buildings loomed over them as they ran as if they were closing in on him. His mouth was bone dry. Footsteps rang out behind him, running towards him and he reached for the knife blindly, waving it in front of him without thinking, all Techno’s training going out of the window. A hand caught his, disarming him easily, and a face followed it into view.

“Icarus it’s okay!”

It was Niki’s voice, but it wasn’t Niki that looked back at him.

Her old uniform was stripped of colour, the armour painted black. Her cloak had a hood now, snapping ominously in the wind behind her, and a mask covered everything but her mouth. If he looked a little closer he might have recognised it as an old masquerade mask she used to wear when she danced, the decorations stripped off in a hurry but he had other things on his mind.

“Oh my gosh.” She dropped to her knees next to him, cupping his head in her hands and tilting it, checking for injury. “You idiots.” The words had no strength behind them other than sheer relief that almost cracked her voice as she spoke.

“Niki?”

“Shh shh. Your leg?”

“Got stabbed.” He mumbled. “I’ll be fine. Ranboo’s worse, he got hit in the head, he can’t teleport, he needs help. What are you doing here?”

“I know, I know, it’s okay.” She told him gently. “We’re getting out of here.”

“How did you get here?”

“Later.” She brushed him off, helping him stand up. “Did you get it?” It was an afterthought at best, she didn’t seem to care, absorbed in the mission at hand. Tommy nodded, peeking the corner of the envelope out of his jacket. Her eyes flashed with a kind of pride and grief.

“We’ll deal with that later. For now we’re getting out of here.”

“But what about -.”

She shook her head, leaving no room for argument. “Sniff got onto the police channels, they’re throwing every force they have at this place, they know it’s Syndicate, they know you were cornered.”

Niki met both of their eyes solemnly. “They are desperate for a win, we either go now or you and your families will be in Pandora by midnight. Is that clear?”

“Crystal.” Ranboo answered for both of them.

“Then we run.”

He threw himself forward again, each impact of his boots on the floor sending aches up his calf. They ran towards the main street, Tommy limping heavily on his leg but he kept on, the wings clutched in his hand. Something felt odd that he couldn’t quite place, a sense of déjà vu but not one that he could place of running down a similar street on much smaller legs. The exhaustion was getting to him he decided, the cold biting his cheeks.

Niki skidded to a halt abruptly, throwing her hand out. “Back.”

She’d dropped onto her back foot, hands up ready to fight. Tommy poked his head around her, trying to see what she’d seen.

Hannah was stood in the middle of the street, half doubled over. She straightened up as they came towards her, wiping something off her cheek, bringing her gun up to point it at Niki, immediately hostile. “Who are you?”

“A friend.” She was staring at the guard with a strange expression. It was returned in kind, Hannah looking her up and down before her eyes travelled to Lethe and Icarus behind her, noting the way they were both looking to Niki for what to do. A kind of understanding dawned, travelling between the two women and she lowered her gun, exhausted. A kind of smile peaked with a bitter recognition.

“Tsunami.” It was almost a question, but not quite. “So we both got out.”

“Rose?” Niki whispered. Hannah managed a weak smile.

“Trust you to go out in a bang.” Her eyes lingered on Tommy. “Does he know.” She could only mean the Warden. “Does he know what all of you are.”

“You know he doesn’t.”

“He was a good man. Let me hope.” The tension hung heavy in the air, so much running between them unspoken.

“Was. Doesn’t matter, there might be people listening.” The other woman accepted this with an incline of her head. “Come with us.” Niki asked. “We can get you back safe.” Hannah shook her head quietly, holding onto her gun a little tighter.

“Too many people, not enough time.” She seemed to make a decision in that time, back straightening. “I’ll hold them off.”

“This sounds familiar.” Tommy muttered under his breath, but no one noticed.

“Don’t do this.” Niki knew, he could see it in her face, in the way her voice shook. “We can make it.”

“Our generation is dying Tsunami, just like all the heroes before us. I have been powerless all my life in that, I deserve to make this choice. You understand that, don’t you.” Niki nodded slowly. “Do me a favour?”

“Anything.” There was no hesitation.

“Tell Puffy I’m sorry. And make this all worth it, burn this rotten city to the ground.” She didn’t wait for an answer, running back the way they came. Gunshots echoed out down the narrow passageway and Tommy’s blood ran cold. “We need to get her!”

“She’s buying us time. We need to go.” Niki said grimly. “Now.”

They rounded the corner to something out of a warzone, all flashing lights and sirens. The area in front of the bank was hemmed by police cars, Enforcers throwing down barricades. It felt unreal, like a scene from a movie except it was there, armed police and all, for them. For two boys in costumes and a dead superhero, he might have laughed if it wasn’t so awful.

“We should have gone back.” Tommy said, his voice hollow.

“The place is surrounded. We would never have made it.” She said steadily, ever the voice of reason. “And we would have had further to run. This is our only hope.”

“We’re trapped. This is enough for a whole riot.” Chills were running down Tommy’s spine. “What do they think we are.”

“They think we’re dangerous.” Niki said grimly. Lethe made an odd motion with his head, whatever emotion it was supposed to convey hidden behind the mask

“Maybe we are.”

“Come out with your hands up!”

A red dot settled on Lethe’s chest, a sniper’s sight as the echo of the Enforcer earlier rang in Tommy’s ears. He wondered for a moment if he was still lying there in the corner of the courtyard, if anyone had found him at all.

“Niki?”

“Do as they say.” She said softly. “I have a plan.”

“It better be good.” Ranboo said quietly. He took the lead, the most recognisable, Niki and Tommy falling in on either side standing far apart so it didn’t even look like they could try anything, they couldn’t put a foot wrong.

Even with the gun trained on him Lethe seemed calm, collected, falling completely silent, the persona falling over him until it wasn’t Ranboo that stood in front of him, but someone completely different. Tommy was almost trembling but looking at the Enforcer trucks all he could see was the fires rushing up the street towards his home, and the hammered notice on Eret’s door. Instead of fear, anger bubbled up, tightly controlled and harnessed to keep him on his feet

“Head up, I need to get as close as I can.” Niki whispered. All eyes were on the three of them, more Enforcers running out, dropping down behind the barricades, training weapons on them. A helicopter rattled overhead as they walked down the steps, more

“How are we meant to get out of this.” He asked bleakly

“It’s the only way.” Niki whispered. “Do you trust me?”

“Get on your knees, keep your hands where we can see them!”

Niki didn’t move. A hand raised as if to signal a sniper and Tommy’s heart stopped in his throat. Then all hell broke loose

The ground split open, a water bursting open onto the street. This wasn’t little whirlpools on a river, this wasn’t a bottle of water in a thief’s face, this was a tidal wave of water rushing from the cracked concrete, wall to wall.

Niki guided it around with almost effortless ease, a puppet master pulling the strings, the water following obediently in her wake. The pavement began to tear apart, rupturing under the Enforcers feet with the force of it all, sending them scrambling for the safety of armoured vehicles but she wasn’t done. She swept up an empty police car high into the air, her movements light and fluid as she slammed it back down again, sending police and Enforcers alike running for their lives. It was a brutal, graceful display of sheer power unlike any he’d ever seen from her. There was no hesitation, caution thrown to the wind. He saw no fear in Niki’s eyes, only sheer determination and that gave him some kind of solace he didn’t know he needed. The anxiety settled a little, but it still churned in the pit of his stomach.

She reached her hands up, and the fog hanging around the skyscrapers above them began to descend, settling heavy on the streets, so thick even the beams of police headlights couldn’t cut through. It lay around Tommy’s shoulders like a safety blanket, the droplets gathering on his cheek. Her eyes were glowing with an odd blueish light as she grabbed their hands and swept forward, carving a path for them through the mist only she could see. It settled so heavy he could no longer see shapes in there at all, figures running right past them as she led them on.

“We can steal a car...” Tommy looked around blindly.

“No. There’s surveillance all over the city they’ll find us.”

“Under the fog?”

“I can’t sustain this forever.”

“How are we supposed to get out of here?” The stress was getting to Lethe as well despite his earlier display of confidence, his voice strained.

“Just trust me.” Coming from someone who had just destroyed a street and washed away god knows how many Enforcers he was somewhat inclined to believe her.

“What do we do?”

She didn't answer, skidding down a short incline and ducking under a bridge by the river side. A grate lay at the far end, covered with leaves and moss but she didn't stop to clear it, tearing it up and waving them in.

“Get down.” They obeyed without question at this point, too tired to even think about it. Ranboo motioned for him to go first. The moss was slick with rain and treacherous. It slid out from under his foot and his leg wouldn't hold him. He landed on his back slightly winded, groaning in pain, curling up into a tight ball. A figure loomed over him and he scrambled back, reaching for the knife in his belt but Niki swung her light up before he could, revealing a familiar face.

“Sniff?”

The deer hybrid held out her hand, pulling him to his feet. “Good job.” The praise was short, but it felt like it carried a weight he didn't fully understand.

“What are you doing here?”

They jerked their head at Niki. “Someone was rallying the troops to get you back.” A small shape in dungarees and a black beanie appeared from behind her and Lethe did a double take.

“Aimsey?”

They threw themselves at him, giving him a quick, tight hug, before looking up at Sniff.

“Aimsey knows the sewer system like the back of star's hand.” Sniff said reassuringly. “Follow them, they'll take you to safety, I'll be right behind you.” Sirens echoed down the grate and Niki glanced up.

"That's our cue to leave!"

“Go!” The deer hybrid pushed them away and he broke into a run again. “Follow Aimsey. He'll show you the way!”

He didn't need to be asked twice. The end felt close, and he ran towards it with everything he had left. His lungs were burning and his chest was tight but it suddenly felt less alone, like they might actually make it out alive. The hope felt wrong, felt dangerous, as if he was letting down his guard too soon but he clung onto it none the less.

He shot a glance over his shoulder to see weeds crawling up Sniff's shoulder, wrapping around the grate and holding it tight shut, sealing it off before they split off in the other direction, deliberately dragging their feet across the muddy floor to leave footprints, a false trail.

“Tommy come on!”

“I’m trying!”

Niki reached out, grabbing his hand and squeezing it reassuringly. “It’s not far.” She promised. “You can do this.”

The air grew thinner, and stagnant, his breathing ragged. The pounding of feet on uneven ground sent knives up his injured calf, over and over. He felt lightheaded, a little unsteady on his feet but he couldn’t stop, fixed on Aimsey, Niki bringing up the rear. The end was in sight, the rest he’d promised Lethe. A second wind carried him along just a little further, but he could only do so much, and when it burned out he was left stumbling, trying to keep up, just a little further.

One step faltered, and his feet skidded across the pebbles. He fell to the ground, head slamming against the concrete with an ugly smack. The last thing he saw was Niki throwing herself down next to him, crying out for help.

He woke up enveloped in warmth. He didn’t quite realise he’d woken up for a few moments, floating on cloud nine in a haze, before it all came rushing back. His arms and legs ached, a pounding headache at the back of his skull. His eyes were glued shut, he had to pry them open, finding himself lying in a hospital bed, the last place he expected to be. The air smelled sterile, the sheets freshly washed, the lights warm and low.

It was a stark contrast to the fear and blood and dirt of the mission, one that left him feeling unsettled. A hand tightened around his, and he looked to his side to see Kristin, a shawl wrapped around her shoulders, eyes filled with tears.

“Hello Tommy.” He wriggled, trying to sit up a little. She adjusted the pillows for him carefully, the worry bright in her eyes.

“Where am I?”

“The hospital.” She must have seen the immediate panic because her grip on his hand tightened. “The same one I was at. We can trust them.”

“Is he awake.” Wilbur’s voice suddenly cut in. He appeared over her shoulder, still wearing his smart clothes from the night before. “Are you alright?”

“Wilbur sit down already.” Kristin chided

“I’m fine.” He brushed her off, striding around the bed and sitting himself down, taking Tommy’s other hand. “Hi.”

“Where’s Ranboo, and Niki?”

“Everyone’s okay.” She promised him. “Ranboo had a mild concussion, Niki with him, as is Techno so he doesn’t wake up alone after the night you two just had.”

Tommy relaxed, before his hand shot to his jacket, now replaced with a hospital gown. “Where...”

“You did it.” She said softly. “Phil has it.” The pride shining in her eyes alongside the worry made it feel just a little more worth it.

The man in question pushed the door open, also still in his suit, the tie discarded somewhere. “Speak of the devil.” She sat up. “How’s Ranboo?”

“He’s alright.” Phil assured them. “He just needs rest.” He held up the envelope so Tommy could see it. “I heard you outside, it’s safe.”

Niki followed him in, a weary expression on her face, lighting up when she saw Tommy awake but coming no closer, Wilbur and Kristin taking up all the room. “Hello you.”

“Thank you.” He blurted out before he really realised what he was saying. “You saved us.”

The weariness melted and she gave him a soft smile. “I wouldn’t just leave you behind.”

“What happened? How did I get here?”

“We were about a hundred metres from here when you collapsed, you couldn’t have chosen a better time.” She said as lightly as she could, though there was an edge of concern still.

“This is the same one Kristin was treated at, and way back, the one that saved Phil after he lost his wings. We can trust them.” Wilbur explained. That didn’t placate the younger much

“What am I going to tell them? The Agency, anyone.”

“Accident in the kitchen, you tried to cook alone.” Kristin said firmly. “They have no reason to suspect you.” He would have laughed, or snapped back at that with some witty retort about how he could cook, but he didn’t have the energy

“We shouldn’t have gone to that thing I told you.” Wilbur got to his feet, starting to pacing back and forth, staring out the window. “I knew Ranboo might need backup.”

“We needed the alibi.” Phil cut him off before he could spiral into that thought any further. “You know they’re watching us. It’s bad enough that we left in such a rush, there’s always room to draw connections.”

Kristin laid a reassuring hand on his arm. “Many people left in a hurry in case they couldn’t get home later, we’re not the only ones.”

“It won’t take them long to put the pieces together on me.” Niki was staring at her hands, deep in thought. “We knew that, but I don’t link back to you.”

“They have no reason to suspect you.” Wilbur argued. “I mean yes there’s the timelines but even if they thought you were alive, no one who knows you in the Agency would think you had it in you.”

He winced. "I mean no offence."

She laughed. "None taken, I know what you mean. I haven't been able to do anything like that in years."

"The news stations are already on it." Wilbur said wryly. "They think Niki's a man, calling her Tsunami's arch-nemesis or something."

"Nemesis." Niki rolled the word across her tongue, testing out the feel of it. "You know. I like that." Techno smiled, but said nothing at all. The door pushed open, and a doctor walked in looking tired, but alert. She greeted him with a nod.

"How are you feeling?"

"Feeling like shit." He mumbled.

"I'm not surprised." Phil said drying. "You lost a lot of blood, Wilbur ended up having to donate his own." Wilbur gave him a thumbs up from across the room.

"You know I'm holding this against you forever, don't you." He said smugly. The humour was bleak, but a desperate relief. He almost didn't notice the doctor leaning over, white light knotting around her hand, seeping into the bandages on his leg.

His eyes widened, just a little bit. The casual use of power felt alien, and yet so right. The relief was almost immediate,

"That better?" She asked with a knowing smile. "I have to wait until the wounds scabbed over properly before I can do that, or I would have done it already." He nodded, not understanding a thing but agreeing anyway and she checked something on his vitals, before motioning for Phil to step aside, speaking with him quietly. A worried expression crossed his face and Kristin sat up.

"What is it?"

"We need to leave." He relayed. "It's looking like a citywide lockdown, if we don't go now we won't get home." The doctor added something quietly and his eyes widened. "They're asking around hospitals. They know you were injured."

"We told them no." The doctor added. "But they knew you came this way. I've done all I can for both of you, I'd normally try not to discharge a patient this fast or this early in the morning but for the safety of you and my patients you need to leave." She said, not unkindly but the tension was rough in her voice. Phil shook her hand firmly.

“I can’t thank you enough.”

“Just doing my job.” A nurse took the various wires and monitors away, and he sat up a little unsteadily.

“Your clothes are in the bathroom.” Kristin told him. “The hospital was able to wash them, I don’t know if they’re dry but you’ll get changed when we get home anyway.” She pointed at a small door in the corner. “Hurry up.” She helped him stand, limping past the window. It was still night, he hadn’t been out for that long and yet he felt a world away.

As promised his clothes were freshly washed, the jacket not fully dry but he didn’t care. He rinsed his face off in the sink, grabbing it. The wings were laid carefully on top. He picked them up, clutching them in his fist before throwing the door open, blindly taking it one step after another to keep himself going until they got home.

“So are we leaving?” He said, sounding much more cheerful than he felt

“They’re starting to sweep buildings.” Techno held up his phone. “We have to go now.”

“We can’t drive, we’ll get stopped,” Ranboo argued. “We have to teleport.”

“Out of the question.”

“I’m doing better now.” He promised. “I think I can do it, just one jump.”

“He’s right, they’re searching cars. Niki alone would give us away.” Wilbur said uneasily. “I don’t like it, but we have to try.”

“This is ridiculous.” Kristin snapped. “It’s too dangerous.”

“He’s right.” Phil said grimly. “He’s our safest way out.”

“That doesn’t say much for our options.”

“No.” He agreed. “No it doesn’t.” He rested a hand on her shoulder. “I’d never do this if I thought there was any other way, but I trust him.”

A slight uneasy feeling settled in Tommy’s stomach, but he took the offered hand, giving it a tiny squeeze of support. Ranboo stood there for a few seconds, gathering his composure. “Ready?”

“Ready.”

They landed on the path just past the back garden, Techno almost falling into the bushes in a scene that would have been comedic if he wasn’t so afraid. Ranboo swayed, nearly collapsing before Kristin caught him

“You meant to put us inside didn’t you.”

“Safer out here.” He managed. She slipped an arm under his, helping him over to the back porch as Wilbur hunted around underneath the doormat in the dark for the key.

Sniff was sat inside in the lounge, rising to her feet when Phil entered, her eyes a little red as if she’d been crying. He chose not to comment on it.

“Where’s Aimsey?”

“Upstairs, I told them to hide just in case.” They reported. “Decided it wasn’t worth the risk to try and make it all the way back to Haven.”

“You said your informant was good.” Niki pushed past strode across the room to face them. “Why didn’t they tell us about the heightened security, the boys could have been killed!”

“She was good! She was.” Sniff’s voice cracked. “She was the best.” Her eyes travelled over to the screen, the news still rolling, and Niki’s followed her.

Security guard who aided attackers found dead at scene.

Tommy almost threw up. He turned away, wrapping his arms around his chest and Wilbur grabbed the remote, switching the TV off.

“It’s okay, it’s okay.” Kristin pulled him into a tight hug. “You couldn’t have done anything more.”

Sniff looked devastated, but they kept their composure, waiting for Niki’s response.

“Enough.” Phil cut them off. “No bickering, not tonight, not after everything they’ve been through.” His voice wasn’t loud but it commanded an instant quiet. Techno moved over to Ranboo, patting his shoulder in an attempt to comfort him.

“It was her choice.” Sniff said finally. “I think she would have done it regardless.”

“The Enforcers behind us would have been able to arrest us far sooner, and I wouldn’t have been able to reach the water mains.” Niki managed, profoundly shaken. “Rose saved us.”

“She knew what she was doing from the very beginning all we can do is make it worth it.” Kristin added, trying to comfort the both of them.

“Heroes don’t die, they go missing in action.” Ranboo agreed. He looked sheet pale, from the concussion or from the news he didn’t know. “She chose to go out on her own terms.”

Tommy had no choice but to accept that, wiping the tears welling up in his eyes for what little that did. “This had better be worth it.”

“It will be.” Techno assured him. “None of this will be in vain, we’ll do anything to get to the bottom of this.”

“No matter what it takes.” Wilbur agreed, a dangerous glint in his eye.

“That won’t be necessary.” Phil had the envelope in his hand, his eyes were darting over the paper, an intent expression on his face. “I know exactly where he is.”

Chapter End Notes

So remember how Rose said she got a job at the bank WAY back. Yeahhhh.

Thank you so much to everyone who sent kind messages for the anniversary, I appreciate y'all so much and I can't believe it's been a year of this fic. We're getting real close to the end now so I'm excited to see what you think of it all.

As for the big announcement, WHT is getting a prequel! It will be dropping hopefully in the next week or so, and will be a chance to meet all of the first generation heroes, Grian, Scar, Archangel, Major, and a younger Warden, as well as the events leading up to Wilbur and Techno's escape and Archangel's fall from grace so look out for that!

Chapter 64

Chapter Notes

hey so quick request, if you're talking about this chapter on twitter please tag it with whtspoilers, as it contains some major spoilers that I want everyone to find out at their own pace, thank you!

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

“Schlatt’s son.” Phil set the letter down. “He wants the kid dead, he doesn’t care how it happens. And he wants whatever the kid stole back at any cost. He’s willing to pay.”

“Tubbo?” Niki shot up. “But he.” She trailed off, seeing Phil’s expression

“Tubbo hasn’t been honest with us about his reasons for running away. We need to talk to him.”

“Right now? It’s the middle of the night.” Niki protested, “He’ll be asleep.”

“If Schlatt is this desperate to find him, and he made a beeline for us, Haven could be in danger.”

“They would have raided already if they knew where it was.” Niki argued.

“Besides, there’s nothing we can do. With Lethe out of action we’ve lost any chance of getting to him or Haven while curfew is active.” Sniff added.

Ranboo tried to get to his feet, mouth open to protest. He nearly fell as he did, swaying on his feet, still very pale, completely undermining any point he was going to make. Niki caught him, shooting an I-told-you-so look at Phil.

“We can worry about him in the morning. Our hands are tied here. I’m more worried about the hospital, it might be an issue if they see you go in but not go out.” Kristin agreed,

“They’ve got bigger fish to fry.” Phil argued. “It’ll be fine. Better that there’s an unexplained exit than Enforcers found the hospital harbouring two Syndicate members.”

“The CCTV?”

“Covered.” He waved that aside. “One of the first things I checked. CCTV will go down for a short time due to the hospital declaring a state of emergency and prioritising important systems. Hospital records show we checked in early and left early for a drunken concussion of Wilbur’s.”

If it wasn’t for the tension in the room, and the lingering shock of Hannah’s fate, Tommy might have laughed at that. Wilbur pulled a face across the room, but seemed unbothered by it, clearly they’d done this before.

“Oh how am I going to explain this to Puffy.” Niki whispered suddenly. She sunk down on the sofa pressing her head to her hands.

“What’s Puffy got to do with this?” Tommy asked, bewildered.

“It’s about Hannah. After Archangel left Puffy had no one, her mentor left, she was a kid, we were both kids, we were younger than you are now.” She stared into the distance. “We were like you and Spark and Purpled, our little group of apprentices. It’s bad enough that I’m gone, now Hannah is dead, Puffy’s on her own.”

“There’s nothing we can do.” Sniff said quietly. “Hannah made her choice.”

She stood up again, pacing back and forth. “She’s going to be alone when she find out. My generation is dying, just like Phil’s did before me and I have to watch from the sidelines and I feel helpless about it.”

“We’ll get you back to her, no matter what it takes.” Sniff said quietly. “It’ll work out. At least until then, you’re alive to watch. And whatever you have done, it’s been far from helpless. You saved the boys tonight.”

“Don’t make promises like that.” She said bleakly. “I don’t know if you or I can keep them, and that’s the worst part.”

She shook her head, sitting up as if she remembered who she was talking to, putting on a brave face. “It’ll be alright. I’m sorry to be such a downer.” She said gently. “I think we’ve all had a long night. Go get some rest.”

“Where will you go?”

“I’ll sleep on the couch for the night, we’ll see how Ranboo’s feeling in the morning. Go.” She urged him away.

He didn’t make any excuses, or say goodbye. He couldn’t get out of there fast enough, trotting up the stairs and tossing his Syndicate clothes into a bag in the corner. He curled up against the wall, staring out of the window. There seemed no chance of sleep coming any soon, the alarms in the bank still ringing in his ears.

There was a quiet knock on the door.

“Go away.”

The knock did not go away. Instead, the door swung open, revealing a mop of brown hair and disheveled glasses.

“Hey.” Wilbur raised a hand. “Mind if I come in.”

“Yes.” He waited patiently, not taking a step in but clearly not intending to leave. “Fineee.”

Wilbur wandered in, sitting himself down next to Tommy, not making any move to speak or do anything at all until Tommy did.

“It’s my birthday.” Tommy said finally.

“I know.” Will agreed. “I’m sorry, kinda, shitty birthday I guess.”

“I’ve had worse.” He managed a weak smile.

“I mean, if it had gone how we planned Lethe would have been in and out and we’d have been home from the party by midnight and no one would be any the wiser. We were going to wake you up in the morning, we had balloons ready.”

“Can’t believe you’re cancelling my birthday already.” The attempt at a joke fell kind of flat despite his best efforts. Wilbur gave him a pitying look.

“I don’t think you’d be in the mood for it.”

“I don’t know.” He said quietly. “I didn’t know Hannah, I feel bad about that, I feel guilty about what happened.”

“Wasn’t...”

“...My fault I know. I know, and that sucks too because I wanted to be able to do *something*.” He balled his fists up in frustration. Wilbur held his arm out, and Tommy fell into it, resting his head on the older boy’s shoulder without a second thought. “I knew it could happen, even in the Agency I knew, but still.”

“Look at it this way, you knew what you were risking when you burned that shop down.”

Tommy managed a faint smile. “I did.”

“You’ve always put your heart into everything you do, thrown yourself at anything that comes between you and what you care about. Me and Techno make that choice every single time we put on the masks, Ranboo makes that choice every time we give him an assignment, Niki made that choice when she ran out there to save you, Tubbo made that choice when he ran away, you made it burning down that shop. It’s the cost of rebellion, it’s just the way it is.”

“I felt cool burning the shop.” He admitted. “I’d do it again. Tonight I was just scared.”

“Icarus, our little arsonist.” Wilbur said fondly. “Maybe we need a new name for you.”

“They’re going to think there’s 50 people in the syndicate at this rate with all the renames.” He grumbled.

“That seems like a smart idea honestly.”

There was a long pause.

“Talk to me.” Wilbur prompted. “What’s on your mind?”

“I dunno. Just feels real I guess.” He said finally. “The Syndicate thing. I really changed sides.”

He made a noise something akin to a huff of laughter. “I mean you burned down a bookshop before.”

“That was for me. Not for the Syndicate.”

“You helped plant a listening device with Ranboo.”

“That was for my friend. The stakes weren’t that high, we got away. Hannah died tonight.” Wilbur’s arm tightened, the moon outside the window blurring through the tears that gathered in the younger boy’s eyes. “It was real.”

“You were brave. What you did to save Ranboo, it was stupid but it was brave as hell and I respect you for that.” He said honestly. “You did everything you could, and more than we would ever have expected of you. Hannah made her choice, she knew the risks, give her that much. The best thing we can do now is make it worthwhile.”

“I don’t know if I can.” His voice shook. “Especially since Tubbo was with us all along.”

“We would never have known. Besides, it’s not just about the letter, it’s what it says to the world, that they couldn’t stop us *twice*.” Wilbur explained. “Ranboo’s been in there before, and both times we’ve gotten away with high-security raids.”

“And Tubbo? What will happen to him?”

“Depends on what he does, and what he tells us.” Wilbur said honestly. “The way Schlatt was talking he has something very important, something which means he’d do anything to find him. He’s put us and Haven in danger.”

“He didn’t know.” Tommy protested. “I was the one who offered, how would he know.”

“I know, and he’s trying to protect himself too, but still.”

“I don’t know how I feel about him.” Tommy mumbled. “It’s probably mean because he was scared but I trusted him and he fucked it up and now there’s something else going on with him that he didn’t tell us.”

“Niki said he looks at you like you’re one of the first people who treated him like a human being.” Something ached in Tommy’s chest, and he pressed his hands against his face, wiping away a fresh burst of tears. “He doesn’t care about us, he’d turn us in for all he cares. He’s more loyal to you than you know, and for that I’m going to give him the benefit of the doubt here.”

“He does?” Tommy looked up. “Really?”

“You have more influence than you know.” Wilbur looked like he was going to say something, but decided against it. He looked up at the clock, then over at Tommy, mouth half open in words he never finished.

“Try and get some sleep if you can.” He said instead, giving him a gruff pat on the shoulder. “I’ll leave the light on, it’s easier that way.”

“Thanks.” He almost wanted to ask him to stay, but the silence felt easier. Wilbur shut the door quietly and he slumped down, falling into more of an unconscious state than sleep if anything at all

“Good morning sleepyhead.”

He sat up groggily, rubbing the sleep from his eyes. Kristin smiled down at him.

“You’re an old man now.” She set a tray of breakfast food down in front of him, a plate in the centre with a somewhat messily iced cake that spelled out 17. “Wilbur did that.” She said, noticing his face. “He insisted on it.”

“It looks shit.” He said sleepily. There was a burst of laughter from behind her and a squeal of protest that was so clearly Wilbur.

“Phil says he’s sorry he can’t be here.” She continued. “But with everything that happened last night he’s got a lot of work to do. He’ll be here later.”

“We’re here instead.” Techno declared, poking his head over Kristin’s shoulder. “And we’re much better.” Tommy groaned dramatically

“I didn’t really know what you wanted, so there’s not a lot in the way of presents, but I know the boys have some.”

Techno waved a package at him, somewhat messily hand wrapped with a very generous use of sellotape, tossing it over. “That’s from Wilbur. And this one’s from me.” The second was much tidier, but oddly shaped. Tommy picked it up, shaking it.

“It’s not lego.”

“Haha, very funny.” Techno’s expression was perfectly deadpan. “I laughed.”

Tommy stuck his tongue out at him, before tearing through the paper, and a mask fell into his hands, made from metal and painted black, the inside cushioned with soft fabric. It fitted over his nose and mouth, fastened in place with two straps, a small filter at the front for air.

“You needed something better than what you had. It was a miracle it didn’t slip.” Techno leaned against the wall. “I made it out of an old bike helmet, I hope it fits?”

“You made it?” Tommy beamed at him. “I love it.”

Wilbur snapped a picture before he could stop him, grinning. “Open mine, open mine.”

“A book of greek myths?”

“Well we’ve named you after like three it seems only fair. I was going to get you an atlas because that’s what you got me but Techno said that was lazy.”

“This one means a lot more anyway.” Techno agreed. “I helped him pick it out.”

“No you did not!” Wilbur lunged for him, and Kristin sighed patiently, handing Tommy a slice of cake.

“Ignore them. They’ve been at this all morning.”

It felt so silly, and so domestic it was almost funny. Somewhere out there the Enforcers were hunting up and down the country for him, a seventeen-year-old in his pyjamas eating breakfast in bed.

“We’re going to leave in half an hour or so to sort out Syndicate business. Are you coming with us, or staying here?” She asked quietly. “It’s not really anything fun to do on your birthday but I’m guessing you want to see this.”

“About Tubbo?” He sobered, setting the tray aside and pulling himself up. “I’ll be down in a minute.”

“Are you sure? I can have someone send you updates instead.”

“No, I need to be there.”

“Ranboo’s waiting for us downstairs. He’s feeling better.” She told him, in answer to his unspoken question. “He’s already taken Niki and Sniff in.”

“Where are we going. Haven?”

“Phil’s work. His office is secure, and has better connection.”

Sure enough, the colour had come back to Ranboo’s face, he looked more awake and steady on his feet. Still not totally himself, but well enough that he seemed willing to teleport again. His eyes landed on Tommy and he made a beeline for him.

“Morning boss man.” Tommy said wearily.

“Hey. Happy birthday.” His voice rose at the end, like it was a question.

“We’ll see I guess.”

“Hey, we survived another stupid thing that should probably have killed us.” Ranboo said optimistically. “That’s good right.”

“Yeahhhh, win streak.” Tommy clapped him on the shoulder. “Are we going then?”

“Sure, give me a second.”

They landed in the office at the top of Phil’s tower. The man himself was stood by the windows, clearly waiting for their arrival, turning with a bright smile as they joined despite the clear bags under his eyes.

“Morning.” Phil opened up his arms for a hug, looking hopeful. Tommy obliged, not without much grumbling. “How’s seventeen suiting you.”

“Weird.”

“Understandable.” He said diplomatically. “We’re making it a quiet affair, I hope you don’t mind.”

“No, that’s perfect.” Tommy agreed. “Thanks. I, yeah I don’t know. Not where I thought I’d be.” He tried a bright smile. “Well did you get me anything?”

Phil chuckled. “I did, well, I will. I was going to buy you a car but Kristin doesn’t approve.”

“What! I want a car!”

“You can’t even drive.” Kristin joined them, smiling fondly. “I’m not getting you an expensive car just for you to crash it.”

Phil winked at him. “She’s not. I will.”

“Fuck yeah.” He looked over at her. “He can be my dad. He’s rich.” That sent her off into a fit of giggles. Tommy felt a warm feeling settle in his chest, grinning widely.

The moment was abruptly halted shortly after as Ranboo reappeared holding onto a sleepy-looking Tubbo. He looked scruffy, in comfortable clothes, utterly unlike the immaculately dressed president's son he’d first met, and more like his age.

He seemed to realise how many people in the room at the same time as they noticed him, a flash of fear subsiding slowly, gathered into a carefully calm expression as he took in his surroundings. First at Tommy, then at Wilbur and Techno watching on from the sidelines, to Niki and Sniff both hovering close to him, trying to make him feel safe, and finally to Phil, clearly the centre of the room, Kristin at his shoulder.

“Niki you promised.” He whispered. “You promised I’d be safe here.”

“I know, and you’re safe, we’re not going to hurt you, I promise.” Niki said quietly, resting a hand on his shoulder. “You’re not in trouble.”

“Doesn’t feel that way.” He stood up straighter, trying to look a little less out of place. Phil leaned back in his chair without a word, tossing the envelope onto the table. Tubbo glanced around, as if checking to see if it was a trap of some kind, before picking the envelope up slowly.

A cold silence fell, all eyes on the boy in the centre of the room as he scanned the letter, his face a mask of calm. Techno’s arms were folded, watching him without any particular emotion. Wilbur was intent, watching on almost hawk-like, waiting for one wrong move.

“Where did you get this?”

“Where does the president normally leave correspondences to the Warden.”

Tubbo set it down finally, taking a deep breath and drawing his shoulders back, staring down the table. “Are you going to kill me now.”

“I think you and I both know that’s not how we work,” Tubbo said nothing. “He wants you dead.”

“I assumed.” The boy showed no fear, his face a blank mask.

“He wants you dead enough to send the Agency to do it.”

“He doesn’t want the blood on his hands.” Tubbo retorted. “He wants a death he can use to make the Agency look bad, two birds with one stone.”

Phil accepted this with a thoughtful expression. “Is there any way he could be following you? Anything at all, any mistakes you made while you were running away, we need to know.”

“Lethe made sure the Enforcers couldn’t track me, we teleported out of my room. I don’t know why he thinks the Warden can find me.”

“Coming here was...a choice.” Kristin said, her voice kind. Tubbo seemed to latch onto a familiar face, looking to her for guidance. “I don’t think he believes you’re brave enough for that.”

“He was right, I’m only here because of him.” He jabbed his thumb at Tommy. “Or I’d be gone already.”

“You wouldn’t be able to leave the city.” Kristin rose to her feet, walking around a little so she could see him better. “I’ve had word from my old staff, they have facial recognition scanning everyone who leaves.”

“You were just going to hide in the boot of a car?” Phil said skeptically

“Didn’t have any other choice. What does it even matter, we’ve both been doing the same thing, haven’t we. Playing it safe to stay alive.” Tubbo said stubbornly. “What more do you want from me, I can’t tell you anything else.”

The older man’s eyes softened. “If I’d known earlier I would have tried to get you out.”

“You couldn’t have known.” Tubbo cut him off. “And that’s fucking stupid to say, you’d never have gotten away with it. But I appreciate the sentiment.”

“Regardless, we promised you’d be safe here.” Phil continued. “And we will keep that promise. You however, have endangered us by lying to us about this.”

“I didn’t lie.” Tubbo said stubbornly. “You never asked. Tommy never asked. I didn’t even know it was this bad.”

“You know that’s not what I’m talking about.” Phil sat forward. “You know more than you’re letting on, you stole something didn’t you.”

Tubbo held up the letter. “He just wants me dead for running away. Like you had to know that was coming, it’s Schlatt.”

“You’re lying to me.” Thanatos clasped his hands on the table, leaning forward.

“I’m-.”

“We have an audio recording of the president speaking to the Warden.” Kristin said quietly. “He specifically states that the person he’s sending the Warden to hunt, you, stole a lot of valuable information.”

Tubbo’s mask flickered for just a second, but there wasn’t a shred of remorse or guilt even caught in the lie. “What’s it to you.”

“You know damn well what it is to us. It’s the end of the war to us.” Techno chimed in. “Exposing what Schlatt has done will destroy public faith in him.”

“And what if I don’t want to share it.”

“Then why did you take that risk.” Wilbur called his bluff immediately. “Don’t start that.”

“Just have him drag it out of me or something,” Tubbo said indifferently, waving his hand at Wilbur. “What are you waiting for?”

Maybe Tommy was the only person who saw Wilbur flinch at that, a shred of an old hurt at the off-handed remark.

“What kind of information do you have.” Tubbo seemed reluctant to answer. Phil leaned forward. “I need to know. You don’t need to show it to me, I just need to know what we’re dealing with here.”

“I’m not willing to share it.” Tubbo said shortly. “If it falls into the wrong people’s hands it’s over.”

“Someone died last night so we could find the Warden’s target before he did.” Phil said quietly. “If that gives you any idea of how much we’re willing to risk to keep you alive, or how much we need that then I don’t know what will.”

Tubbo’s eyes widened slightly, looking to Niki automatically for confirmation as the person in the room he trusted. She turned her head away, eyes bright, which was answer enough for him.

“Guilt-tripping me won’t help.” He replied flatly

“It’s not your fault.” Kristin said flatly. “But I don’t think you understand how serious it is.”

“I don’t even know if I can trust you.”

“Tubbo please.” Tommy said quietly. “I trust them. We wouldn’t be alive if it wasn’t for them.”

“Do I have any choice?”

“Yes.” Tommy said firmly. “Yes, I know, they’re the ones that will give you choice. The Enforcers won’t, they’ll kill you and be done with it.” He was met with silence. “Tubbo please. I haven’t got this far to fail now, please. Schlatt needs to go, and I don’t know anyone else who can do it. I want him gone as badly as you do.”

Tubbo absorbed that slowly, holding his gaze for an almost uncomfortable amount of time. “Ranboo.”

“Yeah?”

“You know the laptop in my room, the one I said you couldn’t touch.” Ranboo nodded. “Can you get it?”

He vanished and there were a few beats of silence

“Sit down. All of you.” Phil motioned for Techno move to the couch. “This isn’t an interrogation. Tommy, you need to go rest, the doctor recommended at least 24-48 hours.”

“I want him to stay.” Tubbo said suddenly. “Please. If...he’s okay with it.”

“It’s probably better he goes.” Sniff suggested. “He was in the hospital last night, they both were.” He watched Tubbo’s expression shift in concern, and curiosity. “This is a lot.”

“I’m fine.” Tommy lied. He could tell by the looks he got he clearly wasn’t but they were kind enough not to point that out. “I want to stay. I helped start this, I want to see it through.”

“Tubbo?” Phil waved his hand towards a seat.

“I’d rather stay standing.” Tubbo’s hands were clasped tightly in front of him.

Ranboo reappeared, looking very pale, setting the laptop case down. Kristin grabbed his arm, moving him back to sit down.

“That’s enough jumps for now.” She said

“What do you have?” Tubbo leaned forward, typing in a password before turning it to face Phil.

“See for yourself.”

Whatever he saw made Phil go pale. He began scrolling, and scrolling, eyes wide.

“What is it?” Kristin asked curiously.

“This is. This is it.” An almost painful hope flooded over Phil’s face. “Oh my goodness. This is everything.”

Kristin leaned closer to look and Tubbo began pointing things out. “Emails correspondences covering everything that happens at the meta facilities. They kept a lot of their interactions in person to keep it undercover, but I have access to bank accounts and that kind of thing that no one else does.”

“Even overseas?”

“Especially overseas.” Tubbo told him. “I have mounds of tax fraud evidence. Schlatt kept it all on this laptop that he never let leave his office, everything he needed to keep track of but didn’t want anyone to see so he could destroy it easily. He was paranoid like that.”

“That feels. Reckless.”

“He never told anyone about it, I was the only one that knew. When I had to leave I ransacked his office and took what I could, plus a mound of evidence I’d been collecting for years, this isn’t just what was on here originally. Photos of the conditions inside Pandora, reports on meta experiments.” He took a stack of files out of the laptop bag. “Those were only in physical copies, I stole them.”

“Oh my god.” Kristin breathed. “Wow.”

“Ten years and we hadn’t even scraped the surface.” Phil agreed. “This is awful.”

“I have copies of everything on here.” Tubbo dug inside his shirt, taking out a memory stick that hung on a piece of string around his neck. “Just in case.”

“You were prepared for everything without even knowing if you’d make it.” Kristin said softly. “I don’t even know what to say.”

Tommy leaned forward out of curiosity at the files. “Wait that’s Android.” He picked up the file, staring at it. A human face stared back at him, no sign of any computer parts, and looking visibly younger

Known as Jack Manifold

Human male aged 24, mechanic, minor regenerative ability

Reconstructive surgery attempted after near fatal workplace accident.

“Voluntary meta testing. It was supposed to help advance healthcare for metas and hybrids so we could understand them better.” Tubbo told him, seeing what he was reading

“That’s...good right?”

Techno shook his head. “Unfortunately they found a loophole that said children could have their legal guardians consent for them, so children who were wards of the state were well, put forward.”

“That’s what happened to you.” Realisation dawned. Techno nodded quietly.

“Didn’t find out what they used it for until much later. Doesn’t surprise me Android was a part of it.”

“Huh.”

“You didn’t think he was always a cyborg did you?” Tubbo said in a weak attempt at a joke.

“What the hell is he doing at the Agency then?” Tommy said, confused. “They wouldn’t just hand that away. That’s like, futuristic stuff.”

Tubbo leaned over, thumbing over a page and pointing at a big red stamp over the page

Model Defective. Further research needed. Current projections show viable life span to be a maximum of 30 years due to organ rejection

A cold chill crawled down his throat. Niki reached over, closing the file quietly. “Let’s let him have some privacy.” She said quietly.

“If we keep this ourselves we only help the institutions we promised to destroy.” Phil said grimly. “I can’t in good conscience let you just cross the border with this and trust it’ll get out eventually.”

“You won’t make it across the border.” Techno rumbled. “Won’t happen. It’s hard enough getting people they don’t expect across there, to get you across would require a miracle. But you know that don’t you, that’s why you came to us.”

“I was hoping you knew a way.” His voice was shaking a little now, the nerves clearly getting the better of him. “I knew you weren’t killing metas, but they don’t know where they go.”

“I can have this live on nearly every major channel between here and the coast by tomorrow night.” Phil explained. “We have people in several stations willing to help out, and the Enforcers power is much weaker the closer to the border you go. If they see what has been happening here, if they see what it’s like for us they *will* be on our side. Now we can try and get you out of here in return, but I can’t make any promises. Is that a risk you want to take?”

Tubbo leaned against the table, “Fine. I’m not leaving.” Niki stepped forward, opening her mouth but he waved her aside. “Don’t.”

“It’s not safe for you here.”

“And it is for you?” He rubbed his arm uncomfortably. “I made my choice already. I have to see this out, just like the rest of you, leaving was my plan before I saw Haven, if I’m going to give this stuff to you it’s my job to stay and make sure it’s distributed properly.”

“I can have it in the morning newspaper if we work fast.”

“It needs more time, you can’t do this overnight.” Tubbo argued.

“We don’t have a choice.” Phil rested his hands on the table, a manufactured expression of calm despite the clear tension in the way he held himself. “We don’t know how close they are to finding us.”

“There’ll be open rioting in the streets. People will die.” Tubbo shot back. “We need some preparation.”

“People *are* dying.” That was Thanatos’s voice again, a power behind it, an old anger that held Tommy rooted to the spot, listening to every word he said. “You knew this day was coming. You do what you set out to do, we need to make sure this gets out, we let them know the truth. We can’t predict what they’ll do with it, we aren’t responsible for the consequences of the atrocities Schlatt and his administration committed. We are only responsible for making the public aware of it before it happens again.”

“If you fuck this up we’re dead.”

“If I fuck this up we’re all dead.” Phil shot right back. “Don’t think I don’t know how dangerous this is.”

“Phil.” Kristin leaned forward, looking concerned.

“It’s worth the risk. We’re out of time, I’ll call my contacts in and warn who I know, and we’ll see what happens.” He rose to his feet. “Everyone out, get some rest, get something to eat, do anything you need to do. The moment the news drops may be the last time we have a break in a long time.”

The room emptied in a somber tide. Kristin glided over to Phil, whispering something in his ear before sitting down next to him, heads together in solemn discussion

Tubbo moved towards the shadows of the room, and Tommy followed

“You really had all that.”

“Don’t, please.” Tubbo said. “I’m stressed enough already about this.”

“You made the right choice.” Tommy tried to reassure him.”

“Best case scenario.” He agreed, with all the meagre hope he could muster. “Thanatos sounds like he has a lot of people who can get this out and that’s exactly what I needed.”

“You look like you’re about to fall flat on your face.” Tubbo didn’t grace this with a response, staring resolutely somewhere into the distance. “Isn’t it funny how we both ended up here.” Tommy said finally, in a feeble attempt to make conversation

“Dunno where I’d be now.” He agreed, with a wry half smile

“I guess we got lucky. They must have felt bad for me or something.”

Tubbo's smile hesitated, and then slowly died. He turned to Tommy with a slow realisation dawning. "They haven't told you, have they."

"Haven't told me what?"

"You can't trust them." Tommy glared at him, and Tubbo had the good grace to look a little guilty. "I know, rich from me. But you can't, not until they tell you everything, don't be stupid. You can't risk that in this place."

He shrugged, indifferent. "Kristin said she'd tell me when she was ready and I'm okay to wait, I know everything I need to."

"No they haven't. Not if you don't know about Theo. Or why they took a random hero into the *Syndicate's* home." Tubbo pressed. Tommy just shrugged

"I guess they felt bad about the hospital situation."

"Why would they? It wasn't their fault."

Tommy just laughed. "Yeah but me and my mum looked in really bad shape after that. You should have seen us."

"Why risk it? They didn't survive this long by letting their enemy in did they?"

"They didn't want to use for my hero status or anything, I know that, Phil's not like that, none o them are. I talked about this with Will already."

"That's not what I mean. You can't trust anybody."

"Yeah well, I get it, I'm stupid and naive and don't know your game." He said irritably. "But let me have this okay."

To his credit, Tubbo didn't push it. Tommy pushed his hands into his pockets, playing with the little black wing charm to try and displace some restless energy.

"Want something to eat? You look kinda pale." He offered. Tubbo's eyes widened for a moment. "I'm not going to poison it dude, don't look like that."

The other boy just shrugged. "I have trust issues."

"It's from the kitchen downstairs. Or Phil can have some sent up, you probably don't want to go in public." He amended, suddenly remembering who he was talking to. "Or I can get it, if you trust me more."

"Would you?" Tubbo lit up. "Just, whatever you find I guess."

“I’ll see what I can do.” He replied, happy for the excuse to get out of there. Niki shot him a look as he left but no one tried to stop him. He took the elevator down into the lobby, and thankfully no one got in with him, he had no idea how to explain to some office worker what a kid was doing in there that wasn’t trespassing.

The lobby was just how he remembered it, peaceful, a small water feature tumbling down past some vines, sending a musical bubbling through the quiet lobby. He reached his hand out, brushing against one of the leaves, recalling what Phil had said about Sniff growing them.

It felt almost bittersweet, the last ghost of someone he knew had been a big part of building this place, and likely none of her colleagues or friends even know they were still alive.

He followed the sounds of clashing plates and cutlery down a corridor. A security guard moved to cut him off but he just held up his card and was waved on with no more questions into a large airy cafeteria, a buffet-type spread at the front, large glass windows offering a view of the city below.

A few people were scattered here and there, sat in front of laptops or chatting in groups, the atmosphere felt very relaxed, and wholly unlike what he was used to, either the tension of the Agency lunch room or what little he had seen of Kristin’s workplace.

It was also a vast departure from the horror of the night before, feeling almost alien in it’s simplicity compared to the flashing lights and shouting. Something about that made it a little heavier in a way, that there were so many people who hadn’t a clue what had happened, who went on with their ordinary lives, and who’d go home tonight none the wiser that the tired looking boy who’d wandered in looking a little lost was planning nothing short of a revolution.

Everyone seemed to be helping themselves so he did just that, grabbing a mug of soup and slipping an assortment of snacks and cakes into his pockets, eyeing a bowl of fresh pasta salad before deciding to come back later, still full from the cake at breakfast.

He sat down for a little while, trying to hold on to that feeling of normality for as long as he could, as if he could pretend to just be a normal kid for a day. As if the world would stop turning for just a second and let him breathe.

The soup was getting cold. He finally picked himself up, heading back towards the stairs, already playing out some silent scenario in his head to excuse the time he’d been gone that included an extraordinary amount of dangerous sharks he had to fight off, or something just as ridiculous.

In his burst of confidence he completely forgot about the existence of the elevator, something he regretted some ten minutes later when he made it to the top of the stairs, out of breath and gasping for air.

Tubbo was sitting at the table now, papers spread out all around him. He was in deep conversation with Niki, heads together over something he couldn’t quite make out. He set down the mug of soup next to him, along with a slice of cake, getting a rare smile in return for his effortst, heading over to slide into a seat next to Phil.

“What’s going on.”

“This is rebellion. Pen is more powerful than the sword or whatever.” He said with a thin smile.

“Writing press releases to accompany the documents when I send them off, makes it easier for them to get on the air faster.”

“That’s so boring.” He flopped down, smacking his head on the desk dramatically. It was a little harder than he meant to, the impact reverb

“I don’t need another boy with a concussion on my hands.” Phil said, not unkindly. “Sit up, stop messing around.”

“Mornin’.” Scott strode in with a cup of coffee in one hand, a bagel clamped in the other. His gaze travelled to Tubbo, raising one eyebrow, looking back at Phil. “Are you kiddin’ me.”

Tubbo raised his head, giving the head of security a quick once over. “Hello Major.” He said, with the very edge of the grin. Scott flung his clipboard down in the table, throwing his hands up in the air.

“Oh come on now. Are we telling everyone?”

“We didn’t tell him anything.” Kristin reassured him. “He’s smart though.”

“Kristin?” Scott blinked in shock. “Hello.”

“Hi Major.” She gave him a soft smile. “Long time no see.”

“You don’t say.” He strode over, enveloping her in a hug. “Last time I saw you you were just an ordinary police officer and Archangel was dead.”

That got a laugh out of them both. “I’m surprised you even recognised me.”

“He’s just been here the whole time?” Tommy piped up, his curiosity getting the better of him. He didn’t even feel surprised anymore, seeing an old hero here was somehow the least shocking part of the last few weeks

“Long story short, after a few close calls he ended up in the hospital and we just had them declare him dead. Orpheus went and charmed a few government workers into making new identity papers and forgetting all about it and now he’s here.”

“Yeah and it’s been fine for years.” Scott glared at Tubbo, making a motion from his eyes to the boys. “I’m watching you kid.”

“Don’t be like that. He’s been very cooperative.” Phil said calmly. “Here. Can you get a message out to Manberg Mail? Their offices were hit in the bombings. They’ll probably be very happy to help.”

“On behalf of the Syndicate or on behalf of a concerned party?” He inquired

“Whatever you think is best.”

“A couple of news stations were hit actually.” Kristin agreed. “A lot of them who expressed negative views of the government, we’re reaching out to them all if we haven’t already got links.”

“So you want me to try and get the neutral ones.” Scott was scribbling stuff down on his notepad

“Once we know we have people to run the story yes.” Phil agreed. “I don’t think they’ll be pleased to hear what’s happened to their colleagues.”

“Or they won’t want to risk it.” Scott pointed out.

“Worth a shot. If we tell them other stations are already running it we might have a chance.”

“How long ‘til it’s done?”

“An hour at most. He was really well prepared, I’m impressed.” The praise made Tubbo sit up, almost a glow of pride beginning to show.

“Good. They just announced they have a lead.” There was a collective intake of breath.

“Does that mean they...”

“If they had anything they would already be on our doorstep Tommy.” Phil cut him off. “If they do find us, then you do whatever you need to do to escape. But they won’t, not yet anyway.”

Tommy wrung his hands anxiously, pacing back and forth. “I don’t know what’s going to happen. I don’t like not knowing.”

“We’re only fanning the flames of what’s already there, it would come out sooner or later. I have to keep telling myself that, we’re only doing what’s right.” Phil reassured him quietly.

“Is there no other way?”

“Alexandria is burning. And there’s no one else left to put the fire out.”

Tommy didn’t know what to say to that, so he just excused himself awkwardly, finding his way over to Wilbur. He pulled a face at the older boy. “Phil’s being weeeeeeeird.”

“I mean he’s waited ten years or more for this.” Wilbur told him. “He’s built up a whole empire for this, it must be odd to be so close to a possible ending. You’ve only been here what, a month, and even you’re relieved about this.”

“Maybe two months?” Tommy said weakly. “Oh god.”

“Also Dad said the restaurant called, the one you wanted to go to for your birthday, we had it booked and all but with curfew that’s probably not going to happen.” Wilbur said quietly.

“He did?” Tommy looked up. “Really?”

“I said it’s not going to happen.”

“I know, I know but...He did that for me?”

“Yeah, it’s what family does.” Wilbur reached over, ruffling his hair, earning himself a vicious scowl

Tommy snorted. “You and your fuckin’ family thing.”

“Hey. You know, maybe in another life they didn’t find you.” Wilbur said quietly. “Maybe in another life you grew up happy and well and safe, on the other side with all the brothers you could ever want and a dad and everything.”

“Yeah well, maybe I’d already be head of the Agency.” Tommy retorted. “Maybe I wasn’t a meta, maybe a lot of things.”

The elder seemed thoughtful, staring out over the city with a distant expression that Tommy couldn’t quite read, lost in some internal conflict only he could see. “Walk with me.” He said finally. “There’s something I need to talk about.”

“Am I in trouble?” Wilbur held the door open for him, letting it swing shut behind them, drowning out the low chatter in Phil’s office.

“No, no. It’s about what Tubbo said this morning,”

Tommy tensed up a little, feeling guilty as if he’d been caught out, though he wasn’t quite sure why. “The thing about Theo? Who’s Theo?”

“My brother.” He said quietly. “I never told you his name.”

“But I know what happened to him. The Warden killed him, you said.” Tommy settled back down. “You should stop listening into things.”

“I’m nosy.” He admitted. “And sometimes I have to tell Techno what’s going on, his hearing isn’t too good after that mall situation.”

“He’s deaf?” Tommy glanced up. “Why did no one tell me?”

“Oh not really, just a bit hard of hearing in one ear, but he’s very stubborn about it. That’s not the point though.”

“Why do I end up doing important things on rooftops.” Tommy muttered. “This seems like a bad idea.”

Wilbur shrugged. “This city’s surveillance is so heavy it’s one of the only places to get a break. Dad put seats up here so we could have somewhere quiet to talk if we needed, I think Ranboo picked it up from us.” He pushed open a door at the end of the corridor, leading him up a small set of metal stairs on the outside of the building. “Don’t look over the edge.”

Tommy proceeded to do just that, his stomach lurching at the dizzying drop below him. Wilbur grabbed the back of his shirt as he swayed a little. “What did I just tell you.”

“I jumped off higher last night.” He said casually. Wilbur’s head snapped around.

“You did what?”

“Don’t worry about it.” He gave him a winning smile, turning around and stepping up into a small rooftop garden, neat gravel paths and flower beds lining the edges, with a small sheltered area in the centre with a bench surrounded by trees to muffle noise. Wilbur made a beeline for the benches, making himself comfortable.

“Well, hurry up then.” Tommy said irritably. “What did you have to say.”

“Hmm. How do I say this. Kristin kept a lot of things to herself that she’s never going to tell us.” He traced a finger along the stone, looking everywhere but at Tommy. “You know that right.”

“What do you mean?”

“I mean you don’t survive that long in the position she had in this city without some powerful secrets.” Tommy nodded quietly, not fully listening but trying to appear engaged. “I’m not implying she did anything wrong, that’s not her style. I’m implying that she has access to a lot of information and knows how to keep it.”

“Get to the point.” He waved his hand in Wilbur’s face. The elder pushed it away, seeming too distracted to get into the usual play fighting that normally followed something like that.

“You know. Techno told me the first day he saw you in that bookshop that he found someone he imagined would look just like our Theo if he ever grew up.” He shook his head slowly, clearly lost in thought. “I could never go. He ended up tricking me, him and Phil both, they said we were just going for waffles and we turned up and there you were.”

“Huh?” Tommy glanced up, not really paying attention. “That is not getting to the point.”

“Shut up and listen I’m storytelling. I’ve practiced this speech a lot let me talk.”

“I’m tired.” Tommy complained. “I’ve had a long day. Say it in simple words, I’m too smart for your long sentences.”

“Do you think the Syndicate would really let just anyone live with them.” Wilbur tried a different tactic. “*Especially* a hero, and we knew you were Theseus by that point. Tubbo was right, didn’t you ever wonder.”

“You got funny words.” He yawned, stretching. To his credit, the older boy didn’t even get frustrated. He reached inside the pocket of his shirt, the one just over his heart, pulling out a small square of paper

It looked a little worn, as if it had been carried with him for some time, meticulously kept neat but the folds were sharp, like it had been opened and closed many many times.

“I wanted to do this properly, but I don’t know how much time we have left now. I found this in your house, when we went to clear it out, in that purple folder you asked me about.”

“What were you doing rooting around in folders with my name on it?” Tommy asked suspiciously. He took it anyway, too curious to ignore it, turning it over, confused. “It’s a blank piece of paper? I don’t see what’s so special.”

“Open it.” He did so obediently, tilting it to catch the light a little better. “Read it.” Wilbur urged. “You need to know.”

“I am, I am, gimme a sec.” He said irritably. He shook it out to reveal a very official-looking document, printed on expensive cream paper, some kind of legal certificate.

Let it be known that I, Thomas Walters hereby renounce the further use of the name Theo Soot, and will henceforth be known as Thomas Walters in all matters legal and civil with immediate effect

Signed by legal guardian on behalf of dependant

Kristin’s name was scrawled underneath. It was dated nearly ten years ago, witnessed and signed by two court attorneys.

Tommy stared at it, blinking owlishly. “That’s my name. That’s the day Kristin adopted me.” He could feel Wilbur’s gaze almost burning into him, waiting for a reaction, anything at all. “I don’t get it.”

“You really don’t remember any of it do you.” Wilbur had a strange expression, some kind of fond half-smile, but tainted with grief, and regret. “Phil said it might be the case, you were only a kid, you blocked it all out.”

“What are you trying to say.” He looked at the paper, and then back at Wilbur again.

“My last name before Phil adopted me was Soot.”

“What does that have to do-. Oh.” He didn’t finish. The understanding dawned harsh, as if a cold bucket of water had been emptied over his head.

“You know what I’m saying.”

Tommy blinked again. “Is this like a prank or something?”

“I don’t joke about things like this.”

“You told me he, your Theo I guess was dead. There has to be some kind of mistake.” Tommy stammered

“What was I meant to say?” Wilbur spread his hands in a kind of helpless motion. “You were about to kill me. You were holding a gun to my head, and in that moment I felt like you *were* dead, I felt like I was staring at a stranger. I thought you were dead for ten years and then you walked back in and hated my guts, my brother was long gone.”

Hearing it out loud sunk another stone in his chest. “Wait. You’re serious?” He stared at the paper again, reading it over as if the words would magically shift. “Kristin would have told me. You could have told me, don’t be dumb.”

“I wanted to tell you. I was going to, and then I opened my mouth and lost the nerve.” He was twisting the corner of his coat, his knuckles white. “Kristin didn’t tell me anything, I even tried to get it out of her, but she either denied it or told me I had to know you first.”

“This is a weird practical joke dude.” He stared at it again. “If that was true then. Then.”

“Then Kristin knew exactly why she introduced Theseus to us at the Sponsors Ball. She knew what she was doing by arranging meetings me and Techno would come to, it would mean she knew what she was doing when she made Phil your other legal guardian.” Wilbur agreed with a sympathetic expression.. “It would mean there was a reason Techno came back to the bookshop every single week. It would mean a lot of things wouldn’t it.”

For the first time in a long time, Tommy was speechless. “But-.”

“I didn’t know for sure until I held that piece of paper in my hand. I confronted Kristin and Phil and they said I had to know you first, I had to earn your trust, I couldn’t just try and, I don’t know, fix it all with a piece of paper proving we were related.” He laughed bitterly. “And they were right and I hate it but they were.”

“If this was true you wouldn’t have been surprised to see me at the hospital bombing.” Tommy said finally. “You would have known.”

“I wasn’t just shocked because you were Theseus. I was shocked because the moment I found out you had powers, I knew without any doubt that you were my brother, it wasn’t just some boy Techno found. That was when I knew for sure ten years of my life had been spent grieving someone who wasn’t even dead. That was the shock you saw.”

He pulled away. In that moment it was starting to feel like his whole life was flashing in front of his eyes, he didn’t believe it, but something about the conviction Wilbur spoke with was sending everything he knew into a steep spiral.

“I think you’ve got the wrong person.” He tried again, not even sure who he was trying to convince anymore

“I know I don’t.” He said confidently. “You know Kristin didn’t tell me when your birthday was, I lied. I already knew.”

"That's the worst proof I've ever heard. Yeah I lied to you, believe me."

"Tommy please." Tommy was having none of it, turning his head away.

"You said he was dead."

"Yeah, I'm a liar!" Wilbur burst out. "I lied, I panicked and I didn't know what to say and I lied then because I was scared but Tommy you have to believe me, I would never lie about this."

"Prove it."

"You want to know why Kristin calls you her sunflower? Because that was where we came from, we were Sunflower children, you, me, and Techno, just like Ranboo would have been an allium kid. We were in the Sunflower facility for nearly a year, do you not remember anything?"

Tommy shook his head. "It's just an affectionate nickname she's always had for me."

"Fine." He was silent for a moment. "Then why were the nurses okay with giving you my blood in an emergency, knowing meta blood transfusions almost never work unless they're with family." He was almost standing now, a feverish light burning in his eyes, bright with triumph at Tommy's shell-shocked expression

"No." He breathed in disbelief

"Yes." There it was again, the light he only saw once before, the night of their confrontation. It was the face of a man clinging onto the barest bones of hope, with nothing to lose. "It's always been there."

"You're wrong."

"Just over ten years ago I lost my six-year-old brother. And now here you are, with the woman who left promising she'd find him, with powers, the same age, the same face, the same blood type, almost the same name. I've done some insane things but right now, I'm not crazy, I know I'm not crazy."

Tommy just stared at him mutely, the paper shaking in his hands. "Why are you doing this?" Tears were gathering and he couldn't seem to wipe them away fast enough

"Because I didn't even get to say goodbye to you." He said softly. "And then you were gone, for ten years, and I didn't know what happened, I didn't know if you were dead, or alive, or in the same system we were, if whatever your powers were, they were being weaponised against us just how Techno's were. And when I asked, you weren't interested in finding your birth family, you didn't think they cared but they do, I do."

"Why now? Why not when I first moved in, why not explain this ages ago when I actually needed a reason to trust you?"

"Well, now you're with us so you won't think I'm doing it to get you on our side. And now we're out of time and yeah, it's a little selfish and maybe I don't learn but if it all went wrong tomorrow, I didn't

want to regret not having a chance to say it.” The energy seemed to deflate out of him. “Maybe I don’t learn, but I’m just sick of lying.”

“Why does it always come back to this. To some impulsive fuckin’ thing you do.” He said tiredly

“Do you know how long I’ve waited to meet you!” The words broke out of Wilbur’s chest like he’d been holding them back, clinging onto them for all he was worth, filled with a kind of anguish Tommy had no way of understanding.

“Will?”

“Do you know how long I have lived with the regret that I didn’t fight with every last bit of strength I had to hold onto you. Because you can’t remember how the truck split open, you can’t remember Techno trying to protect us as an angel with black wings broke us out, how he carried us away from it all. You don’t remember how you were ripped from my hands, how I *screamed* . You were only little.” He reached a hand out as if to take his, before snatching it back. “Kristin spent years looking for you.”

“I don’t think I’m who you think I am.” He tried again

“I think you believe me.” Wilbur said quietly. “I think you know.”

“I...I want to.” The words felt like they were ripped from his tongue. “But Will you know how crazy this sounds.”

“Is it? Or does something make sense.”

“But if it’s true and the Warden didn’t kill Theo then...”

Wilbur nodded quietly. “He knows. They don’t know who the Syndicate are now, they don’t know our names or anything, I made sure of that, but they do know enough to say that the boy with voice powers and the boy with the invulnerability are the same Orpheus and Achilles that are fighting them now. And they know you’re our brother.”

“If he asked me to kill you, I would have.” Tommy whispered. “And I know he would have asked.”

“How do you think Tubbo knew. It’s in your official records, they know what you are to us. I guess he thinks we were withholding it from you for some kind of malicious reason but really mum told me to wait.” He said sheepishly. “And Kristin’s scary when she’s angry.”

That drew a choked laugh out of him. “Yeah she is.” He said fondly.

“Do you understand now?” Wilbur asked quietly. “He would have had you take this place, would have turned you against your own family, would have lied to you and watched you kill us and never said a word. They wanted to use you as a weapon.”

“She would have told me,”

“What, and put you in danger? You were a kid with a dream, you put your heart into the Agency, what would it do.”

“Kristin would have told me!” He winced as soon as he finished saying it, his voice echoing far louder than he’d intended.

“I would have told you what?” Kristin’s voice cut across the garden and he didn’t know if he wanted to shrink down behind Wilbur’s coat or run to her and beg her to make it all make sense like he was a little kid.

“Oops.”

At the lack of response Kristin walked closer, head tilted in concern. “Tommy?”

“It’s fine.” He waved her away quickly, but she knew better. She came a little closer, and then spotted the piece of paper on his leg. Even upside down she seemed to recognise it, shaking an accusing glare at Wilbur

“Don’t.” He cut her off. “Don’t take this from me. He has to know, I can’t lie to him anymore and it’s not fair on him or me if Tubbo ruins this for us, which he will.”

Tommy held his breath, waiting for Kristin to be confused, to deny it, to ask what he meant. But she didn’t move.

“Mom?”

“See what I mean.” Wilbur said softly. “Go on, ask her to deny it.”

“Don’t put me in this position Will.” She said quietly. “You know that’s not fair, this was meant to be a family decision.”

“Mom?” He tried again. “What’s happening?”

She knelt down to look him in the eyes, wrapping her hands in hers. “When you first came to me about the Syndicate, I promised you’d be safe here, but that you had to trust me when I couldn’t tell you why. This is why.”

“It’s not true, right.” He demanded. “Tell me it’s not true.”

“Oh Tommy. You know I can’t lie to you.” That should have crushed him, but against it all, hope surged in his chest. Against everything he *wanted* it to be true, some little devil on his shoulder was begging for it to be real. The feeling was so alien, so strange but so freeing.

“It’s true.”

“I told you there was more that I couldn’t tell you yet, that you weren’t ready for yet. I suppose Wilbur thinks you’re ready now. Your family is here, he’s always been waiting for you.”

“You’re my mum.” He said stubbornly. “You raised me. Don’t talk like they’re my family, you are.”

She was close to tears. "I wasn't a very good one."

"You were the best." He said fiercely. "The best I ever had."

"I was never as much of a mum as I wanted to be." She said sadly. "I rushed into it, just trying to save you. I wouldn't change it for the world, but I do regret a lot of lost time, and not being able to explain why I took you in knowing I might not be the best person for it."

"Why the name change?"

"It was court-mandated, they wouldn't let me adopt you without it, probably trying to hide you from your brothers. I was hoping if you never showed your powers they'd leave you alone."

Tommy stared at her. "That's why you hated me using them?"

She nodded. "I was hoping if we could hide it long enough they wouldn't take you away." He opened his mouth to ask another question. "We'll talk about this later, I'll answer everything you need to know. But the certificate is real. I thought it was lost in the fire though but I think he's been holding it this whole time."

"You're not mad?" Wilbur sounded his age all of a sudden, the switch jarring

"I'm disappointed you didn't let us be a part of this, but I understand why." She took Will's hand, squeezing it gently. "Are you alright?"

"Yeah I'm fine." His voice audibly broke.

"Stop it." She flicked Wilbur's nose, pulling him into a hug as well. "It's okay to cry."

"I'm sorry, I just thought I was going to lose him last night, I couldn't wait." She patted his back gently. "I didn't mean to."

"It's alright. I wish you'd spoken to us first but I understand. I think we're all tired and a bit emotional." She let him go. "I'll go talk to Phil, and tell him what's happened. You sit down and talk with your brother and answer any questions he probably has."

"Can you send Techno up?"

She headed back to the fire escape and Tommy watched her go, wiping a tear from his cheek. He scuffed his shoe against the gravel, kicking it into the flower beds.

"So. Yeah. I didn't plan this bit." Wilbur said awkwardly. "What do you want to know?"

"I don't know what I want Will." Tommy curled up in a ball. "I don't know. Where do we go from here?" His voice broke.

"I don't know." He began to wander across the garden towards the wall. "I planned to just, go out in a bang I guess. I was willing to do anything to take Schlatt and the Agency down, no matter what. But

now you're here and I don't know."

"When you say go out in a bang..."

"I didn't see an end to this. We were taking on the whole government with just us. I didn't see us making it out alive but I couldn't just not try and now maybe there's hope, maybe there's an afterwards and there's you."

The younger absorbed that slowly, fixing his gaze somewhere in the distance. "Is that why you took me clothes shopping? I always thought that was weird."

Wilbur looked a little guilty, studying the skyline, the wind tousling his hair across his eyes. "Maybe. I didn't even believe it then, I just wanted to..."

"Pretend."

"Yeah." He admitted. "That's the word. Not just for me but mainly for Techno. He carried the guilt with him for a long time, he's just quieter about it, and he had hope for the first time, I didn't want to be the reason it died."

"I can't believe how fucking long you lied to me for."

"What would you have done, if we told you. Kristin was right." He shrugged. "I meant to tell you last night, because I panicked after the hospital but it was all the wrong time so I just came and sat with you instead, you needed that more."

"I 'preciate it I guess." Tommy mumbled. "But Techno too? I trusted Techno."

"And you still should. He wanted us to get to know you as your own person, give him credit, he's been here for you since the beginning, he just shows it in his own way I think it's why he's so hard on you in training, he wants you to be able to protect yourself this time around."

"Oh." Tommy rubbed his shoulder as if in memory of the frequent bruising he put up with in those training sessions. "Is that his excuse?"

"He always protected us, that's probably how we survived so long. I guess he feels like he failed. Don't tell him I said that though." He added quickly.

"But he didn't fail?"

A door slammed behind them, and Wilbur made a motion over his shoulder. "Tell that to him."

They turned to see Techno at the top of the stairs, taking in the scene in front of him with a hint of confusion. "Kristin said it was important?"

"Yeah uh-," Whatever Wilbur was going to say, he didn't finish. Techno took in the tears on Tommy's face, and the stricken expression on Wilbur's

"You told him." It wasn't a question. Wilbur could only nod.

“Tommy?” Techno turned towards him, an oddly defenceless look on his face, silently searching for his approval. Tommy didn’t hesitate, running over to him and throwing his arms around him. He didn’t quite know why, maybe searching for some kind of rock in all this uncertainty, but he hung on nonetheless

“I tried to save you.”

“It wasn’t your fault you know.” Tommy told him. “You couldn’t have done anything.”

“I know.” He agreed, voice rough with emotion. “But there was only one person that could tell me that in a way that would let me forgive myself for it.”

“How did you find me?” He mumbled into Techno’s coat.

“Chance. I went in there one day and saw you and I knew, and then I started chasing paper trails and I never got close enough to proof but too many things lined up. And then Kristin came into the picture and it all made sense.” He paused. “I have something to admit. I may have lied to you.”

“That is the worst opening I’ve ever heard.”

“The incident in the shop where I said I called you Theseus. I uh, didn’t.”

Tommy’s heart fell into his stomach. “You said Theo. Didn’t you.”

“I rescued it afterward. I always used to tell you stories about greek heroes when you were a kid, I guess I was hoping you’d remember.” He looked a little guilty. “It’s a silly thing, but I feel bad.”

“Stupid name. Theo.” Tommy replied, instead of unpacking the feeling that had just slammed into him, a gut punch to the stomach.

That got a chuckle from them both. “You always used to say that.” Wilbur teased. “I started calling you Toms instead, I guess that’s where they took Thomas from.”

“Hated Thomas too.” He stopped, turning slowly on his heel. “Wait but you kept...”

“Calling you Toms. Yes he did, and I yelled at him for it.” Techno pushed his hands into his pockets with a half smile, some way between melancholy and fond

“Why?”

“Wilbur never accepted you were dead in the way of someone who only half moved past the denial stage, hope against all reason. I never believed you were dead because I had reason to.” Techno said simply. “But I accepted that even if you were alive and we found you you wouldn’t be the boy we knew, whereas for Wilbur you were frozen in time as a little kid. He’s still learning and growing, and he makes mistakes, but for us, for you he’s willing to try and try again until he gets it right.”

Tommy’s eyes filled with tears all over again and Techno reached out, pulling him back towards him. “We have so much to talk about when this is all over.”

“You are in so much trouble.” Tommy muttered. “Both of you. I’m not forgiving you for this. Not ever.”

“Tommy I’m sorr-.” Wilbur trailed off as Tommy reached out, grabbing onto his arm, clinging onto his brothers as if his world would fall apart if he let go

Chapter End Notes

I HAVE BEEN SAT ON THIS FOR SO LONG. I'll be chilling in the WHT discord's spoiler channel if anyone has any questions, but just know I have barely been able to keep this secret for SO LONG

If there are editing mistakes in the chapter, no there aren't, i had to stop editing or i'd get too nervous to post this but here we are!
also,



Art by the amazing @bluestrasa on twitter, please follow them, they have more WHT art on the way!

Safe and Sound (for a bit)

Chapter Summary

Quick WHT refresh as it's been a while, Tommy burned down a shop, got roped into a bank robbery, it went badly but they made it out with Niki's help and were able to obtain information that pointed to Tubbo as having run away from his old home with a lot of information that could destroy Schlatt for once and for all, and after confronting Tubbo, he's pulled aside by Wilbur who drops a massive bombshell on him about Wilbur's younger brother Theo and who he really is

Chapter Notes

Thank you so much for nearly 150k hits that's crazy! Also the song for this chapter is Safe and Sound, by Taylor swift

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

He didn't know how long he stood there, holding onto Wilbur and Techno, letting the world stand still for as long as he could. He would have stayed longer, but Techno drew away finally, knowing if he didn't they might have stayed there all day, safe, as if shielded from everything the last few days and weeks had thrown at him for just a little while.

"What now?"

Wilbur shrugged awkwardly. "Don't look at me. I said I didn't plan this far."

"We just go on." Techno answered for him. "What else can we do."

"That's it?" Tommy asked, a little shakily. "That's all?"

"You can have a big celebration if you want." He replied wryly. "But really we've been reunited for quite a while, you just didn't notice it."

"I don't know."

"Are you shaking?" Techno's tone was teasing, but kind, and it almost felt worse that way.

"I nearly killed you. I would have killed you I didn't know." The words spilled over Tommy's tongue too quickly, bubbling up from some pit in his chest. "I didn't know."

"I know." Wilbur said gently. "Worst came to worst, I would have used my powers, I'd have worked something out. Neither of us were in the best frame of mind but we'd have been okay."

"You're lying."

“Yes. I am.” Wilbur said simply. “But I think we’ll both feel better if we believe it.”

“We have to keep moving.” Techno intervened. “There’s no point dwelling on things, we can’t afford that kind of time.”

“Yeah easy for you to say.” Tommy muttered.

“I spent weeks going back to one bookshop, I’m the king of dwelling on things. But it doesn’t matter, you’re one of us now, not because of who you are, but because of what you did, because you earned it. It doesn’t matter what you did, you were a scared kid who’d been lied to, it wasn’t your fault.”

“Take your time.” Wilbur echoed. “I know it’s a lot.”

“No kidding.” He took a long, ragged breath. “It’s easier than I thought.” He admitted. “I dunno, feel like it’s supposed to hurt more.”

“It will.”

That earned Wilbur a sharp elbow to the side. “That’s not reassuring.” Techno told him off.

“This changes everything for me.” Tommy said weakly. “It should hurt more.”

“How?”

That brought a silence as Tommy stared into the distance, trying to find the words to describe the churning, the chaos and confusion in his head right now, so loud he could barely think straight. He failed.

“You were always stuck with us.” Wilbur continued, grinning slightly. “Ever since Mum and Dad clearly were...”

“She’s not your mum!”

“In my heart she is.” He said solemnly, still smiling from ear to ear. “She saved my life after all.”

“She saved all of us.” Techno added, mediating quickly before Wilbur could wind him up anymore. “None of us would be here today if it wasn’t for her, so we’re a little attached. Also Wilbur’s winding you up and it’s working.”

“Fuck you.” Tommy grumbled into Wilbur’s sweater. He let go of him, rubbing his arm awkwardly.

“That was why we were told to wait.” Techno continued. “So it wouldn’t be like your whole world got upended. It’s easier to accept the Watsons than accept you might be related to the Syndicate, the people you wanted dead. Kristin did everything she could to make this easier for you.”

Tommy could only nod tearfully. He wiped his eyes roughly. “Fuckin’ hate this dumb shit. I don’t cry.”

“You do now.” Wilbur reached out, ruffling his hair. “We’ll go see what Phil and the others are doing,” He suggested, kindly giving him a way out of it all rather than carrying on with teasing him, although that may have been because of a sharp warning glare Techno was levelling his way.

He hesitated at the edge, looking back across the skyline behind him for a few long moments.

“You coming?”

“Give me a second.” Wilbur took this as a dismissal, shutting the door quietly behind them both. Tommy wandered to the edge, staring down at the street below.

The wind stirred his hair up, pushing it across his eyes and he brushed it aside irritably, watching the pigeons soar between the rooftops. He could join them, he could fly now, he could do so much more than he’d ever dreamed of, and instead of fear at the thought, at the idea of discovery, now there was an excitement.

Something had shifted, and whatever boy he’d been an hour ago, he’d never be him again. That was a strange feeling, one that he’d been feeling more and more lately, but more and more he didn’t think he was so mad about the person he was becoming, not he really knew what to think of it all.

He steadied himself, taking a few more deep breaths of cold city air, before turning back to the fire escape. He opened the door expecting Wilbur or someone to be waiting for him, but instead he almost bumped into Tubbo, who was heading the other way.

“Oh. Hi.” There were a few seconds of silence as they stared at each other, waiting for the other to speak first.

“They told me.” Tommy said finally

“About what?”

“About Theo, about me.” He chose each word carefully, as if having them out there in the air would make them feel more real, give substance to the strange reality he'd entered into.

“You understand then? Why Schlatt sent me after you.” The other boy asked, his voice almost too quiet to hear, as if he was afraid of the response. “Why I couldn’t let him get any more information, why I had to do this. You had to get to the Syndicate, you had to make it here, they had to explain what the Warden did.”

“You knew.”

“Of course I knew. It’s the biggest open secret in the government.” Tubbo said nonchalantly. “That the Syndicate won’t step out of line because we had a member of their family under our thumb. So they could serve as an excuse for Schlatt to crack down on metas without any fear of backlash.”

Tommy stared at him, mouth half hanging open. “That’s so…”

“Evil? Yep, it’s almost cartoonishly evil. But it works.”

“And what would they do if I found out?” Tommy challenged him. “That’s crazy.”

“You’d hate it.” Tubbo replied evenly. “You despised the Syndicate. And why wouldn’t you, why would they ever think anything would go wrong. You were under the care of the Police Commissioner, one of the most powerful offices in the state, you were in the Agency under the Warden’s thumb, if you knew too much well. It’s a dangerous job, things happen to people who talk too much.”

“Just like they wanted to do to Niki.”

“Just like that. You’re starting to get it.”

As much as his tone was casual, Tubbo’s eyes betrayed a much deeper struggle, a kind of horrible guilt but also a strange numbness to what he was saying, to the horrifying things he’d known all his life, that Tommy could only guess at.

“I want him gone Tommy. I’ll do whatever it takes to see it happen. If it means screwing up everything I care about, if it means running for my life, if it means putting my salvation in the hands of what should be my enemies, I’ll do it, just watch me.”

The words were said like a challenge, but behind it all Tommy could still see the hesitation, the clouding eyes of a boy who’d given up everything for a vengeance he might never live to see, and yet still just a boy, like him. One way or another, they’d both become victims of a system they were fighting to change, while still feeling like nothing more than tiny cogs in the great machine.

“You’re serious.”

“Dead serious.”

“Why are you trusting me.” Tommy stuffed his hands in his pockets, “I’m the worst fuckin’ person to trust. Ask, I don’t know, the Agency or something, they never trusted me with anything, or just look at me.”

“Eh.” Tubbo shrugged. “I think they’re scared of you because now they have nothing. Schlatt doesn’t have me, Sam doesn’t have you. It’s over.”

“We don’t know that.”

“It has to be like that.” He said stubbornly. “Because if it isn’t I don’t know what I’ll do.”

They began to walk down the corridor together, Tubbo’s arms wrapped around himself, expression drawn pale with worry. Somehow from what little Tommy knew of him, that seemed almost a good thing, the mask was off, he wasn’t afraid to show what he was feeling. That had to mean something.

It didn't last long. A few steps, and the thin veneer was back, Tubbo drawing up his shoulders, letting his arms hang to his side as if he'd heard what the other boy was thinking.

"Well. I feel like you haven't thought this through." Tommy said finally. "What if it went wrong? What if I never knew, you'd never be able to use the Syndicate."

Tubbo stopped dead in his tracks, pivoting on his heel slowly. "Thomas Walters I am not getting lectured by you about poor plans."

"What the fuc-."

"Who nearly died in a bank yesterday?"

He almost had a smart retort, but the events of the night came rushing back with a sharp vengeance. The retort died somewhere in the echo of alarms and gunfire.

"You're very chatty today." He noted instead. "Nerves?"

"Something like that."

They stopped outside the door to Phil's office, both looking at each other to see who would move first.

"If..." Tubbo trailed off. "If anything happens."

"Nothing's going to happen."

Brown eyes stared back at him with the weight of far more years than they'd lived. "*If* something happens, I need you to do something for me. Make sure I'm not forgotten. I didn't do this for the credit, but I'm really fuckin' sick of being forgotten."

"I can do that." Tommy said hesitantly. The barest hint of a smile appeared on the other boy's face, like some kind of tension had fallen from him

"Happy birthday Tommy." Tubbo turned, holding the door open for him. "Coming?"

Phil raised his head as the two of them came in, noting the lack of animosity between them with a slight tilt of his head though he said nothing, glancing over to his sons and then over at Kristin, one eyebrow raised. She was sat on the couch with Niki by her side, having just been in some kind of conversation.

If he looked close enough, she seemed a little teary eyed, but she blinked, and it was gone.

"Don't look like that." She told Phil. "Enjoy the peace while it lasts. They'll be bickering soon enough."

Wilbur surged forward, a bright grin on his face, clearly about to cause trouble, only to given a warning look by Kristin

"We don't have time." Phil waved him aside. "I need everyone listening." Silence fell immediately. "So this is the plan. Press releases are now with my company media team, as far as they know this is

just a personal side project that's come to my attention, no mention of Syndicate involvement."

Techno raised one eyebrow. "They'll know."

"Schlatt will know." Kristin corrected. "Ordinary people will just see a concerned businessman come forward who's got a long history of wanting to improve the city and many friends in high places who could access this kind of thing. Anything else is just a conspiracy theory."

"So....We're not saying it's our doing?" Tommy said, confused. Phil turned away a little too quickly for him to see the proud smile that flickered across the older man's face when Tommy had said that but Wilbur didn't hide it, beaming from ear to ear.

"He said our."

"Not now Will. No Tommy, the Syndicate will come in later." He continued. "I'll be escorting Tubbo to various interviews we have scheduled and once those are published in papers or go live, and only then does the Syndicate get involved."

"As if we only just heard about it." Kristin explained to him. "It's not ideal, but with the way the city sees us, it's for the best. They trust Phil, they might not know Tubbo but he's a damn good source, we'll work on them trusting the Syndicate once the stage is set."

"I've called in everyone I can." Phil said solemnly. "By tomorrow, whatever Tubbo and I take to them now will be all over the morning papers. It'll be all the headlines."

"All of them?" Tommy asked quietly. "How did you do that?"

"The Syndicate is more than just a dramatic name, like I said before, we have people all over the city, knowingly or unknowingly affiliated with us." Phil told him.

"That group expanded kinda quickly after the bombings." Scott chimed in. "Added a ton of news agencies that Schlatt targeted. Which is how we're doin' this."

Tommy nodded slowly, taking that in. Somewhere in the back of his head the frenzied radio calls still echoed from that night. He distantly remembered something about a bombing in a newspaper office. It made enough sense that the papers knew damn well who'd done it to them, despite what the officials said.

"What then?"

"Then we imagine either the Agency will shut down, or you'll be called in for rapid damage control, given the information we'll be outting about the Warden."

"Is that safe?" Niki asked. "I mean, what he did was awful but, it could make the situation against metas worse, not better. No one will see what Schlatt did as wrong when metas act like the Warden did."

"She's right." Techno agreed. "It could be spun against us really quickly."

“We’ve considered that.” Phil agreed. “But we have no choice. If it comes out later it’ll be much worse, the best we can do is frame him as a turncoat or something, someone who decided to work against all metas, and then bury that underneath evidence of all of the president’s and governments evils.”

Tommy shifted his feet uncomfortably. “I don’t like this game very much.” He mumbled. Tubbo looked surprisingly sympathetic.

“At the end of the day, he dug his own grave. If it wasn’t us, it would be someone else.”

“Regardless, we’re just going to have to wait and see.” Phil interrupted, casting an uneasy glance out the window behind him. “I’d love to say I have a definite plan at that point but we don’t, we’ll have to work as we go.”

“Dumb political shit.” Tommy complained. “I don’t get it.”

“Waiting for the action movie and the high speed chases and all the big dramatic fights?” Techno teased him gently. “They aren’t very ineffective at getting where we want to. We need to change their minds, and we need evidence. Then we can do the big explosions.”

“Phil you should go now.” Scott tapped his watch. “The Enforcer patrols change in nine minutes, you’ll have a thirty second window to leave in when there’s no one or you’ll have to wait another four hours.”

“There’s still Enforcer patrols on the gates?” Tommy asked. Wilbur’s eyes sparkled.

“I can deal with them. If you want.”

“Not yet.” Phil waved him aside again. “They’ve become a little too good at spotting when you’ve been messing with them and we can’t risk anything now. Take them home Ranboo, we’re done here.”

Tommy reached out for Ranboo, grabbing his sleeve. The older boy looked down, a little concerned.

“You good? You look a bit...” Tommy wiped his eyes roughly

“A lot just happened. I’ll fill you in later.”

“You’d better.”

“Don’t worry.” He heard Phil say quietly in the background as he and Tubbo vanished out the door. “I contacted a friend of mine with your approximate measurements, we’ll get you a suit or something before we get there.” Somehow that was reassuring to Tommy too, that the other boy was in good hands.

They rematerialised in the back garden, everyone immediately scattering, Kristin and Niki heading to the kitchen, Ranboo trailing over to the hammock strung up in the corner near the pond, complaining of a mild headache. Tommy stayed right where they left him, feeling as if the ground might just open up beneath his feet and swallow him whole

The sparrows chirped in the hedges, a plane hummed across the sky far above, someone's car backfired up the street. If it wasn't for the wide garden and high security walls, and the tiny glimpses of the expensive houses over their fences it felt just like home.

Tommy was quite enjoying being delusional about his home being gone. If he squinted hard enough and almost closed his eyes, he could be back in that messy front yard again that neither him nor Kristin had the time to weed, back in the crumbling red bricks, arguing with that neighbour that let his trash spill all over the sidewalk, as if it wasn't just ash and rubble now.

"Thinking big thoughts?" Techno's voice snapped him out of it. He opened his eyes

"Still. Dunno. Processing I guess."

"It'll take a while." He reassured. "But you'll be okay."

"I didn't know why you didn't just, I dunno, give up on me." Tommy mumbled. "Back when the thing with Wilbur happened and you came to bring me back, I didn't know why. I guess it makes sense now."

"I'd have done it either way." Techno told him. "Brother or not, you were a kid in distress, it wasn't your fault."

Tommy chose to ignore the way his stomach dropped at that, but not in an unpleasant way, more in the way of the jarring impact of something he realised he should have been able to take for granted and just...couldn't.

"Remember when I asked you what your weakness was. You said I'd know." Tommy said instead, a little hesitantly, in an attempt to change the subject to something a little more lighthearted. "And I mean, I've been here for a while and I've never worked it out."

Techno chuckled. "Well, look at it this way. If someone held a knife to your throat, and told me to put down my sword, do you think I would?"

"Well, no, you're Achilles."

He reached over, ruffling Tommy's hair. "And that kid, is why you haven't worked it out yet." He wandered away, whistling to himself rather cheerfully.

"Tommy!" Kristin's voice echoed out from the kitchen window before he could work out what exactly that meant. "Tommy we're eating cake!"

"Wait for me!" He broke into a run, speeding past Techno, ducking inside the door.

It all felt a little strange, like he was spinning. He could hear their voices echoing in his ears and it felt warm and safe in that small kitchen, in a little bubble all of his own. The flash of the camera as he

blew out the candles, the cheers, the cheerful music from the radio, it felt so safe but also like he was experiencing it all from a distance, as if he couldn't quite believe what was happening yet.

Kristin was laying out trays of sandwiches and snacks she must have prepared in advance, though Tommy hadn't a clue when, or how she'd done it without anyone noticing.

An arm settled around his shoulder as he watched, and he looked up to see Wilbur draw alongside him. Tommy leaned into him wearily.

"Do you think Tubbo's okay?"

"Dad knows what he's doing." Wilbur replied. "Don't worry about him."

"Weirdass birthday." He tried to make it light hearted but it sounded a little broken.

"We're alive." He said quietly. "You reached your seventeenth, we'll take it day by day from here. I got my brother back, that's all that matters."

Tommy pulled a face, and Wilbur just grinned that same easy lopsided grin, squeezing his shoulder before gliding over to the table to help himself to food. Niki replaced him, popping up with a slight smile.

"So, turns out I won't be at your hero graduation." She said after a slight pause. "But I think I prefer this." She turned, and without any warning pulled him into a tight hug. "I'm so proud of you Tommy."

"I'll cry." He threatened. "I'll fuckin' do it."

"You do that." She replied fondly. "You do that."

"Why does it feel like everyone's saying goodbye." He whispered. "I don't like this."

"No one's saying goodbye." She said fiercely. "No one. We just...Everyone's just nervous and you don't make it easy for people like Wilbur to say they care about you so they're taking the chance while they can."

"Yeahhh fuck that guy." Tommy grinned somewhat lopsidedly. Niki sighed fondly, shaking her head but letting him go and passing him a plate.

"What do you want?"

He could spend forever in that little bubble of time, first in the kitchen and then sat in the corner of the lounge in the comfiest arm chair, with a blanket and an empty cake plate and a tub of his favourite strawberry ice cream, watching Techno and Wilbur squabble over some board game.

He knew their smiles were a little forced, he knew they were trying to put a brave face for him but still the joy was genuine, even with the glances at the time, or the way Kristin watched anxiously out of the window. If he tried for long enough, he could forget, and if he couldn't forget then he knew they were doing it for him.

They did all this, for him, and never asked for anything in return.

He could get used to this.

The afternoon drew into evening with no sign of Phil or Tubbo. They sat out in the garden as it drew dark, Kristin's suggestion to let off steam but he knew perfectly well it was so she could watch out for any sign of them coming back.

He wandered over to her, sitting down next to her on the bench, resting his head on her shoulder. She pulled her blanket around him, shifting to make him comfortable.

"There's supposed to be a meteor shower tonight." She told him. "Techno was talking about it earlier." Tommy's eyes flickered up, but the sky glowed too bright with all the houses and street lights to see a thing.

"Cool."

Kristin laughed at that. "You know, one day we'll have a house out in the countryside." She continued. "We'll be able to see the stars from there?"

"Promise?"

"I promise." She tucked him in a little more. "But that's not why you're here, is it."

"Can't I spend time with my mum." He joked weakly.

"Out with it." Kristin said, not unkindly. "Say what you want."

"I wish you'd told me." He said finally. "I know why you couldn't but I...I wish."

"I know." She smoothed her skirt nervously. "When this is all over, I'll tell you everything, I promise."

"Can I ask one thing?" He said quietly.

"Of course. Anything."

"Why didn't I know?" He pressed. "Why didn't I remember, six isn't that young, I should remember. That's the part I don't get."

"Maybe that's for the best, you didn't even know my face when I came to pick you up for the first time." She said quietly. "Maybe it was too much, you were too young, maybe Wilbur tried to protect you and he doesn't remember how but he wiped your memory somehow to keep you safe, who knows. But it's real, I promise."

"I know. You wouldn't lie to me." He said finally. "You don't tell me everything but you don't lie to me."

"Never." She promised. "And like I said, you will know everything in time."

A car rumbled outside on the gravel, and he sat up. "Phil's back."

“He can wait.” Kristin brushed him aside, still gazing up at the sky, and the few stars that peeked through. “We’re having mother son time.”

“But don’t you...”

“We’ll talk later.” She interrupted. “Just stay here for a bit. I don’t get much time to spend with you anymore, let me have this.”

He wasn’t planning to argue with that, tucking himself back under her shoulder like he was twelve again, curling up and watching the frogs slip in and out of the pond in the hazy moonlight.

He trailed off to bed at last, taking the blanket with him like a cape. Out of the window he could hear Phil and Kristin talking softly under the trees for a while, but even once they went to bed his rest was fitful, twisting and turning without much chance of sleep, not that he’d expected much else really.

He woke in the early morning. It was still dark out, and a glance at his phone displayed a dire warning that the curfew was still in place. A knock at his door, presumably what had woken him.

“Tommy?” He sat up groggily.

“Who’s there?”

“Me.” Ranboo poked his head around the door. “Can I come in?”

“You can’t sleep either huh?” He said wryly. Ranboo held up his communicator, the screen of which was lit up bright blue

“They’re calling us in.”

Tommy’s stomach dropped, a band constricting around his throat, “Now?”

“Now.”

“It’s 5am.” He complained

“I know. Get your Theseus gear on and give me your Syndicate kit.” He held his hand out. “I’ll hide it in my Lethe bag, I can teleport it into the building without any risk of door checks or anything.”

Tommy complied, still half asleep but the sudden urgency roused him fast. He tugged his uniform on, wrapping himself up in his blanket and running down the stairs, trying to shove some remains of the party food that had been left onto the table into his mouth despite the churning in his stomach. He knew today of all days wasn’t something he wanted to go into with an empty stomach.

Kristin came in, wrapped up in her dressing gown looking sleepy but worried. She must have read the look on his face because in an instant she was next to him, hand on his shoulder, a rock in an ocean.

“Tommy?”

“We have to go.” He blurted out. “Now.”

“I’ll go wake up Phil. Just wait for him.” She told him. “Debrief him before you go.”

Footsteps clomped down the stairs, too light for Ranboo. Wilbur swept in, fully dressed, looking just as sleepless.

“Good morning?” He asked. “It is morning right.”

Ranboo nodded stiffly, his fingers drumming out a nervous rhythm on the stove top. Dull thuds above showed they’d woken Techno as well, Phil staggering in a few minutes later, a little more put together, pulling on a jacket. “What’s happening.”

“We’re getting called in. Something must have gotten out.”

“It’s an all units call.” Ranboo told him. “Every hero active will be in the Tower.” He

was watching Phil with the expression of someone who knew something that no one else did, Phil seeming to recognise it. “Are we...”

“Perhaps.” Phil said slowly. “It might be our best shot.”

“What are you going to do to them.” Tommy blurted out without even thinking.

“Nothing.” He was reassured quickly.

“Probably.”

“Not helpful Wilbur.” Phil glared at him, before turning back to Tommy. “Incompetent or not, the Agency is the biggest threat to us, so we need to make sure they’re either with us, or out of our way.”

“Are you going to hurt them?”

“Nothing like that, unless we have to.” Tommy raised an eyebrow. “Wilbur would tell them to sleep for a while, nothing dangerous. But to do that we need entrance to the building.”

Tommy’s eyes widened a little. “You want us to let you in.”

“That’s all you need to do. Just keep your head down, and open the door at the back of the building when we give the signal, from there we do the rest. Just cover Ranboo’s back, that’s all you have to do.”

“And then?”

“Do you trust me?” Tommy nodded finally, getting to his feet. “Then we’ll just see. Keep me updated on everything.”

His communicator buzzed again, a loud beeping noise this time.

“We gotta go.” Ranboo grabbed his wrist and he barely had time to prepare for the teleport, snatching one last mini sausage roll off a plate before he was teleported away into the Agency locker room

“Wait, I needed to ask...”

“We’re on our own now.” Ranboo said firmly. “It’s okay, we got this.”

“Since when did you become the reassuring one.” Tommy complained. He got no reply, the other boy more focused on sliding aside a panel in the wall, stuffing their Syndicate gear behind it before anyone could see them.

There were voices from inside the medical wing. Tommy poked his head inside out of curiosity, only to see Android laid on a bed, a metal plate on his chest open, exploding a tangle of wiring. His side was wrapped in bandages, and he looked very pale, Supreme hunched over him.

“What the fuck are you starin’ at.” Android scowled at them both

“You uh. You got some screws loose.” Tommy said weakly. Jack sat up slightly, squinting at his shoulder.

“Dunno. Must have been a bit rusty.” The sudden sense of humour took Tommy a little off guard.

“He’s made that joke to at least 3 people.” Supreme said without looking over their shoulder. “Hello Theseus, Void, are you visiting?”

“Uh. Not really.”

“Then scram. I have work to do.”

Tommy didn’t wait around to be told again, escaping back out to the stairs. The Tower was nearly silent, all the lights were still off but one by one he could see shadows appearing in the lobby, disappearing into the changing rooms, one after the other. Some he could make out, like Puffy’s distinctive mane, others he didn’t have a clue, faces covered as they rushed in.

His heart was pounding again, eyes darting around the room. If it wasn’t for Ranboo’s constant presence at his shoulder, it would have been a lot worse but as it was, most of his expressions were hidden behind his mask.

“Hey.” A voice hissed at them from down below, and he stood up to see Eryn motioned urgently. “Come over here. You gotta hear this.”

Purpled appeared behind him, both already in gear. “Do you know what’s going on?”

“I think I have an idea.” Eryn tapped the radio. “You’re not going to believe this. I was just listening to the news and apparently some crazy shit’s gone down.”

“Should we check the TV?” Ranboo asked. “The one in the canteens kinda old but...”

“News channels have been shut down.” Eryn explained. “I just heard it on here. They’ve been struck from the air, technical difficulties at the broadcasting station or something.”

Tommy gulped. “That doesn’t sound great.”

“No listen, listen.” Eryn waved them closer. The four of them huddled on the floor around the small halo of light cast by the radio. “You won’t believe this.”

The radio crackled a little as he tuned it. “...Rumours swirling that none other than the presidents son, Tobias Schlatt has come forward to speak about allegations of wide spread corruption against his

father and other senior officials, something suspected by critics and...”

Ranboo’s shoulders sunk in barely perceptible relief. It had worked, against everything their plan had worked, it was on the radio, people were hearing it. The cat was out of the bag, so to speak.

“Wait hold on, there’s more. Schlatt was talking lemme find it.” Eryn fiddled with it again. “Stupid thing, work.”

The radio crackled again, forcing silence. “The idea that my own son would do this is devastating. Either he’s being held against his will, or this is something far more malicious, something that has intruded far deeper than even I know. Let me be clear, the Syndicate are not a rebellion, they are not freedom fighters, and to call them such is an insult to all those who have suffered under their reign of terror.”

“Mr President the allegations of corruption have substantial ev-.”

“I vehemently deny any such accusations.” Schlatt cut whatever brave reporter had interrupted him off. “And the fact that they’ve been able to circulate despite their blatant inaccuracies is a plague on our press and a shattering of trust with the public.”

“But the files show-.”

“They’re falsified.” Schlatt dismissed it again. “And with enough time, my administration will be able to prove it but we can’t be expected to expose top secret files out of nowhere just to clear our name against falseifications, it’s clearly just a strategy to weaken our nation and it has gone far enough, they have done enough damage. There’s no more time, with fists or guns or whatever it takes, we will drive the meta scourge from this city. This is it, this is our doomsday, tomorrow the fate of our democracy lies in the balance. I will not let it be taken from the hands of good honest people by those who seek to destroy the very principles our democracy is built on with this....Slander.”

“Democracy.” Purpled scoffed. Ranboo shook his head slowly, eyes glued to the radio

“He’s provoking a civil war.”

“There’s no way people believe this.” Tommy looked up at Ranboo, knowing full well it was mostly wishful thinking but Ranboo indulged him anyway

“Why wouldn’t they. They have no reason to believe anything else, I mean what’s in those papers is pretty crazy.”

“What papers?” Purpled looked up.

“Uh, the morning papers.” Tommy rescued quickly. “We saw them being put out. There’s some crazy headlines.”

Purpled didn’t look convinced, and when he turned away Tommy could still feel his gaze lingering on the back of his neck.

“They’re saying the bombings were faked.” Eryn whispered. “Can you believe that?”

“That’s crazy.” Tommy said weakly. “No wonder we’re being called in.”

“And there’s more, apparently the Agency -.”

“What are you doing.” A familiar cold voice cut him off and Tommy nearly jumped out of his skin. In their focus the Warden had crept up on them, barbed trident clutched tight in one hand. “I’ll ask you again, what the hell are you doing?”

“Nothing.” Tommy scrambled to his feet, but he wasn’t so easily fooled.

“Give me that.” Eryn stuffed it behind his back.

“What?” He said innocently.

“Give me that.” The Warden demanded. “Now.” He didn’t wait for an answer, snatching the radio from Eryn’s hand, crushing it in one metal gauntlet. “Get in the meeting room. You should have been there ten minutes ago.”

“Dude.” Eryn stared at him. “What the hell.”

“Come on.” Ranboo grabbed his shoulder before anything else went down, guiding him away. “Lets go. Quickly.”

Tommy ran after them, grabbing Eryn’s other arm, pushing him on. “Don’t try anything.”

“No kidding.” Eryn whispered. “He looks mad. And the radio said…” He looked back over his shoulder to see the Warden following them closely. “I’ll tell you later.”

“You’d better.” Purpled said grimly. “I don’t like this.”

Eryn raised his voice a little. “Do you have my lighter?” He asked innocently “I want that back.”

“Uh.” Tommy shrugged. “Dunno, lost it somewhere.”

He was saved from any further explanation by the door opening in front of them, Puffy waving them in quickly.

“Buy time.” Void whispered in his ear as entered. “That’s all we need.”

“Got it.”

Sam strode to the front, slamming his weapon down to call order but it didn’t matter, everyone’s attention was already focused solely on him.

“Thank you for all *finally* arriving.” He shot a glare at the boys, who were all staying a little back in the corner. “I meant to call a meeting yesterday but someone assured me it could wait. Unfortunately whatever situation happened with the Syndicate is now out of hand.”

“The theft of top secret documents followed by this? They have to be linked.”

“The Syndicate stole them for forgery purposes, nothing more.” Sam waved this aside. “To cause the disruption you may have noticed if you saw the radios or news channels this morning. The Enforcers are working to shut down the spread of any anti-government propaganda as quickly as they can.”

“Forgery?” Eryn raised an eyebrow. “I think we all know Schlatt’s corrupt, they look legit to me.”

“Half of us don’t have a clue what this is even about.” Foxtrot chimed in. “You aren’t telling us anything.”

“The Syndicate is planning a major offensive of some kind. They have the news channels and the papers, we’re assuming via some kind of blackmail or monetary reward.” The Warden said grimly. “Which means until this is resolved, we can’t trust anything that comes out of them, and right now what is coming out is claims that the recent bombings were false flag attacks, tools used by Schlatt to spread fear, and the Syndicate are trying to drag our name into this.”

Half a truth, if that. Perhaps as it always had been. That very thought scared Tommy to the core.

“I called you in because we need to get this under control, and fast, and you all need to be aware the Syndicate are after all of us.”

“I don’t know, the radio said they were only after-.” Blaze covered his brother’s mouth with a hand.

“Not now Spark. Ignore him Warden he’s angry he had to get up early.”

“We failed to keep Lethe under wraps. Thanatos has now come out of the shadows, Icarus is completely new to us, we’ve lost any control of this situation.” Android challenged him, clearly having been quickly repaired and rushed out of the hospital wing, out of uniform and in a ragged t-shirt, ignoring the brothers squabbling. “And you’re telling us nothing.”

“Icarus, Thanatos.” Foxtrot added. “What the fuck is all this, we were dealin with a talker, a fighter and a spy, and maybe a leader of some kind, that was all the Syndicate was. Where the hell did the new ones come from, whatever the hell her name was.”

“Nemesis.” The Warden said thinly. “They’ve dubbed her Nemesis.”

“We went from some elusive terrorists to an army. That getaway was an organised procedure, what haven’t you told us.” Android demanded, shoving some kind of file across the table. Tommy had to press a bitter smile away, it was many things but organised was far from one of them.

“I knew about Thanatos, he wasn’t a threat to us, there was nothing we could do. Lethe got leaked to the papers, hence the Ghost of the Syndicate nonsense.” The Warden shoved the file aside dismissively. “As for Icarus.”

A hand closed around Tommy’s wrist, both holding him back and reassuring, Void moving next to him as a picture of Icarus was placed down on the table. He was caught in mid step, running towards the alleyway, zoomed in until it was almost pixelated.

“This is him, according to the testimony of the guards.”

“They’ve already been questioned?” Punz kicked his feet up on the table. “Damn.”

Puffy nodded solemnly. “Enforcers aren’t messing around here. They’re angry. Guards and eyewitnesses were questioned all night and most of yesterday too. Several....disappeared.”

“If Enforcers haven’t found them we won’t.” Punz said dismissively. “And I’m not walking into the middle of that fight. We can’t do anything here.”

“Without exact information on their movements leading up to the robbery, their motives, any personal features beyond vague estimates of their height and some blurry images we’re fucked.” Jack agreed grimly. “And I don’t think the Enforcers care about helping us either.”

“No they don’t.” Puffy agreed. “I’ve contacted them saying they need every hand on deck they can get but all I got was a vague reply about it not being the right time to have heroes intervene considering attitudes in the city right now.”

“Then there’s no point in us being here.” Punz said, confused. “I don’t understand, if we’ve got no information and no jurisdiction in this mess why are we here.”

“They’re still set on seeing us fail.” The Warden’s voice was low, and angry, his fists clenched. “We’ll get a desperate call in a few hours when it’s all gone wrong, and then we’ll be blamed for their mistakes and we need to be ready for that.”

“Haven’t we already failed.” Purpled leaned against the back wall, looking much like he’d rather be anywhere else than here, not unusual for him though. “You’re literally pandering to Schlatt right now, we’re not getting anything done.”

Puffy gave Purpled a warning look before the Warden could say anything but Purpled’s sentiment was surprisingly echoed around the room, to his horror.

“You used to be so passionate about this.” The Warden turned his head slowly around the room, weary and worn faces looking back at him. “What the hell happened.”

“Things changed. People died.” Tommy muttered. “What do you expect.”

It came out louder than he meant to in the awkward silence of the room. The Warden’s gaze was now fully on him, riveting him to the spot.

“Theseus of all people, I would think you’d know better than to give up now.” He chided. “You’re better than this.”

“You gotta be crazy not to see there’s nothing we can do.” He mumbled, some of his sudden confidence abandoning him as all eyes turned to him.

“I’m working hard here to fix this.” The Warden said stiffly. “There’s a campaign of lies building against the Agency right now that threatens all of us, don’t you get that?”

“Stop fucking acting like you’re the only one who ever works here.” Tommy yelled right back. “Stop acting like you’re the only one who’s lost shit for this!”

“Don’t you take that tone of voice with me-.”

“Where’s Tsunami.” Tommy stared back at him, breathing hard, his heart pounding in his chest. “Where is she, if you’re the only one who’s struggling here, cos I don’t see her standing in here like she should be.”

“Theseus...” Puffy began

“I’m going for a walk. I’ll be back.” His heart was pounding in his chest but at the same time, he just didn’t care. If he didn’t move out of that room now, he knew he’d say something he regretted, something he’d rather not say surrounded by people who hated the Syndicate almost as much as he once had.

“Theseus!” The door slammed behind him. He slowed, letting Ranboo catch up, still breathing hard. “You alright?” He nodded weakly. “You left him speechless.”

“Just needed a reason to get out.” He let out a long breath. “I’m staring at the guy who let my home to be burned, bombed my city and wanted to use me as a weapon against my family.” He glanced up. “How did you do it? For months, how.”

“I knew what I was here for, I knew he was lying, and every time he lied it made it easier.”

“Purpled knows.” Tommy said quietly. “I don’t know how but he knows.”

“He’s smart.” Ranboo agreed. “I think he put two and two together way back when I first met you as Lethe. He hasn’t turned us in though.”

“We don’t have long do we?”

A quiet head shake. “Just hold on for a little longer. The Syndicate are almost in place.”

“We’re really doing this.” He breathed. His heart pounded faster, the walls seeming to close in on him along with a fate that he didn’t yet know quite how it would unfold.

“We’ve got this.” Ranboo promised. “I’ve got your back.”

“Ditto.” He replied without thinking.

The door opened again, and the Warden stepped out. Tommy straightened automatically, preparing himself for the inevitable telling off he was about to get.

“I’m going to go get ready.” Ranboo whispered. “They’re on their way.” Tommy nodded just a tiny bit to let him know he’d heard.

“Theseus. I’d like a word.” He dismissed Ranboo with a wave of his hand, almost infuriatingly arrogant but Ranboo knew better than to push it, taking the chance to escape down the stairs as Tommy turned to face his superior.

“What is it Warden?”

“Sam. Please, just Sam.” He took his helmet off, setting it down next to him. “I’m sorry about my outburst, Puffy was right, you didn’t deserve that. I shouldn’t have let my stress get in the way.”

He wanted to feel bad, he wanted to scream and yell and admit everything he'd done and have it all go back to being right and okay and normal again, but looking down at the Warden now, he just seemed pathetic.

"I need to tell you this now." He said solemnly. "I don't know how this is going to go. The Syndicate have really done it this time, and I don't know how to stop them, I can only mitigate the fallout.. Puffy is incredible, and I couldn't have done this without her, but she's not a leader, she doesn't know what to do in times like these."

"I think you're wrong." Tommy said boldly. "People trust her."

"What do you think?"

"I used to respect you a lot more than I do now." He said honestly. Sam just nodded, dragging his fingers through his ragged hair, the green dye half faded, uncared for.

"That's just growing up, teenagers man." He meant it as a joke but something in it just didn't sit right with Tommy anymore. With what he knew now, he realised he could never hear the man who'd once almost been a father figure to him in the same way, and that betrayal stung more than anything.

"Speaking of, I'm formalising your promotion first chance I get. You and Void both won't have mentors any more and you're old enough so might as well finalise what we all know."

"You're...making me a full hero." It was everything he'd dreamed of, but now it felt like lead on his shoulders. One more irony to add to a growing list of betrayals.

"Yes." The Warden smiled slightly, mistaking the hesitation for excitement. "I'm sorry it couldn't be in better circumstances and all and you won't have a proper graduation until things blow over but, I think you've earned it."

Tommy blinked owlishly. "Not even a happy birthday? You're gonna yell at me and then promote me because I'm old enough by one day?"

"Look, I have a lot on my mind." He replied, not very apologetically if Tommy wasn't honest. He straightened up, pushing his helmet on. "Never meet your idols hey."

"I don't know." He replied. "I met one of my idols, and he was everything I thought he'd be. It just depends."

He could see the confusion but the Warden chose to say nothing, leaving quickly. Tommy didn't even let himself stop and process what had just happened, slipping his Syndicate earpiece in.

"Where are you?"

"Getting ready, get to the south door, quickly." Ranboo called back. Tommy ran down the stairs, no one there to see him with everyone confined in the meeting room. He ducked into a small corridor, running towards the end and sliding his ID card across the lock. It turned green, clicking open, and he propped the door with a small stone to keep it there.

This was it. The gates of Troy had opened or some dumb shit Techno would say. He stared at the door for a while, at that final, mundane betrayal, and felt only a rush of adrenaline, retreating quickly to the lobby, climbing the stairs to the first floor.

“Theseus.” A hand settled on his shoulder and he jumped nearly out of his skin, spinning around. Puffy smiled kindly back at him. “I needed a break as well.”

“Doesn’t...”

“He’s busy.” She looked a little dishevelled, which wasn’t unusual with the stress she’d been under but this was different. Her eyes were stained red, hidden away under the shadow of her hat but this close he could see she’d been crying.

“Are you okay?” He said finally. “Is this about...Rose.”

“I’m alright.” She said at length. “I knew what Rose was like, she was never happy with standing by. I hope-.” She trailed off, unable to continue, staring up at the light with misty eyes. “I hope whatever she died for, it was worth it.”

Tommy almost laughed. “Don’t let the Warden hear you say that.” Puffy’s smile turned a little more bittersweet.

“You sound just like Niki right now.” Her voice caught on those words. “Oh god we’ve had a rough few months haven’t we.”

He could only nod wordlessly.

“I don’t know if it helps but this wasn’t the way we used to do it.” She said sadly. “I know they tell you a lot of bad stuff, about back in the day. But it wasn’t that bad, it really wasn’t, they didn’t know what we were, sometimes they were scared but they never hated us, not like this.”

“I watched the documentaries a lot.” Tommy managed finally. “They seemed happy.”

“They were. Being a hero was something exciting back then, that’s why I signed up, it was a chance to make something of myself.” She looked distant, staring at memories only she could see. “Pandora is just some old warehouse they turned into a prison, it’s all new, all the fear is new. Only in the last ten years, since they got those power suppressor things, that’s when they got this arrogant. Before that, our lives weren’t too bad, to be honest.”

“Why are you telling me this?” Tommy asked, a little confused

“With this sudden promotion and all, that I wasn’t even consulted on.” She sounded a little angrier at those words, but not at him. “I wanted to make sure you were alright and well, you know you’re not alone and you can come talk to me if you need to. And.”

“And?” He prompted.

“I see Niki in you, I see her a lot. I think she would have wanted you to know the truth, and I think you’re owed it after everything you’ve done for this place.” He decided to push his luck a little.

“Warden doesn’t seem to think so.”

“He’s a stubborn man.” Puffy said sadly. “He’ll never change, as much as I try and help him. He’s stuck in the past, he always will be.”

“I don’t think he knows what he’s doing anymore.” He replied more boldly. “I don’t know if I can trust what he says.”

The Captain studied him for a few, long moments. “We all did this because of something we believed in. I can’t fault you for saying what you think is right.” She said gently. “Whatever it is you’re not telling me, all I ask is that you stay safe. I know the Warden makes it out like the Agency has to be your whole life, but you’re young, and smarter than I probably know, you have so much more ahead of you.”

“Thank you.” And he meant it.

“Do you want me to stay? Or leave you alone?” She offered. “I don’t mind.”

“Please. Go back. I’ll be up in a second, I promise.” He glanced up the stairs, only to see a faint shadow appear from the locker rooms. Lethe stared down at him, white mask unfaltering, a knife in one hand. “Uh. Might want to hurry.”

“Huh?”

“Just, go.” Puffy took another step down towards him, growing more concerned than suspicious but a little of both.

“Theseus are you sure?”

“Yes, yes I’m sure.”

“I’ll ask the Warden to send someone down to keep you company, you shouldn’t be down here in the dark and upset.” She reached for her communicator, and Lethe made a split second decision, vanishing and reappearing behind her, knife in one hand held to her throat

“Don’t move.” He whispered. “And don’t try and call for help.”

Puffy’s hands flew up to her throat, trying to turn her head. She probably could have thrown him off if she tried, but she went still at the sight of his mask, some kind of realisation dawning. “You.”

“I’m sorry.” Tommy said quietly. “I asked you to go.”

“Everything alright?” A voice called down the corridor he’d just come from.

“The Captain’s here.” Lethe called back. Orpheus strode in, longcoat flying out behind him in his haste, concern written across his face.

“Oh you have it sorted.” The concern faded on seeing Puffy standing helpless at the foot of the stairs, her eyes growing wider and wider as the Syndicate filtered in, glancing at the barred door at the other end of the lobby. Orpheus followed her gaze, cracking a smile under his mask. “Reinforcing the front door means nothing if you leave the others wide open.”

Achilles followed him in, taking a slow look around the lobby, before laughing quietly.

“You know, I was expecting something more.”

“It’s not much these days.” Nemesis said softly, slipping in behind him, keeping a wary distance from Puffy like she was trying to stay out of her sight as one last person walked in, wearing a smart green jacket, leaning heavily on a cane.

“Phil?” Tommy breathed in disbelief. “What are you doing here?”

The older man inclined his head. “Change of plans. There’s a chance I could be useful here.”

Puffy’s jaw went slack, her hands falling away from the knife at her throat as if she’d completely forgotten the danger she was in. “What?”

“Let her go.” Phil ordered. “She won’t fight us.”

“Are you sure...”

He nodded once, motioning to the balconies. “Get into cover. We don’t need them to know how many of us are here.” Lethe obeyed without question, vanishing somewhere into the half darkness, a few of the lights flickering on as Achilles hit the switch, scanning the room out of habit for anyone else.

“What the-.”

“Puffy.” Phil sounded suddenly subdued, a little sad.

“Phil.” She folded her arms. “Before you say anything, I know what you’re going to ask.”

He cracked a wry smile. “I knew you knew more than you let on.”

“You didn’t think I’d forget you that easily.” She whispered. “Where have you been?”

“I think you know.”

“If you want my help, I can’t.” Puffy said quietly. “I’m not your student anymore, I don’t know the man you’ve become. I can’t help you.”

She turned slightly, her eyes settling on Tommy. “Icarus.”

The word felt alien from the captain’s mouth. He could only nod, a horrible sense of guilt rising in his chest, not because she was angry but worse, because she seemed to understand. But she barely looked at him, fixed on the one person who was trying to keep as far from her as possible. “Nemesis.”

Niki drew a little closer, moving to protect Tommy if she had to.

“You know I wouldn’t hurt him.” Puffy said quietly. She hadn’t taken her eyes off Nemesis once. “Is it true? Tsunami lived?” Niki nodded wordlessly. Something broke in Puffy’s eyes, some dam held back, tears spilling down her cheeks

“Puffy if I could have told you I...”

“I get it.” Puffy’s eyes were clouded. “It’s okay I understand. But not like, this isn’t right, this isn’t what we wanted.”

“Are you going to try and stop us?” She was silent for a few seconds, and then looked down at the floor

“You can’t fight the tide, I know, I’ve tried it. I don’t know what you have planned or, or what this is, but I hope it’s worth it.” The last part was bitter and that stung more than he was willing to admit.

“It’s for the best, at the end of the day.”

“I don’t care about the best!” Puffy burst out. “He’s my friend. Even with everything he’s done I cared about him once. I don’t know the man who placed that bomb but I knew Sam. Don’t make this sound like it’s easy.”

“He’s not the Sam we knew, not anymore. Not for a long time.”

Puffy shook her head, her voice thick with unshed tears. “There’s no way I can talk you out of it?”

“As much chance as there is of us talking you out of this.” Niki replied evenly. That drew a smile without any humour, a kind of terrible understanding between friends walking different roads.

“I’m taking you sailing, when this is done.” She told Niki. “So you’d better make it out alive.”

“I’ll hold you to that.” Niki whispered. “I have so much to tell you.”

“I never believed it.” Puffy replied. “I knew you were better than that.”

A bittersweet smile cut across Nemesis’s lips, but whatever she wanted to say was abruptly cut off by a door swinging open, and footsteps.

“Puffy, the Warden wants you...Oh my god.” Android drew to a sudden halt, staring down at the scene below for a few long seconds, noting Puffy backed against the stairs. Without his usual armour, he backed away quickly, eyes widening but before Lethe could do anything he slammed a hand on his communicator before anyone could stop him. “Help! The Syndicate have breached the building!”

The Warden burst through the doors, forgetting his mask in the rush, not that he seemed to care, the Agency spilling out behind him, Blaze with fireballs held ready, Purpled’s gun drawn.

On seeing Puffy in such a precarious position, Sam skidded to a halt, staring down at them. The Warden turned his head to Tommy slowly, and the boy felt his stomach sink.

“What is this.”

“Hi Warden.” He managed, as lightly as he could muster

“Theseus. Tell me this isn’t what it looks like.” He got no reply. “I’d say I should have known but I really had no idea.”

“Neither did I, to be honest.” Tommy said wryly. “It was kind of an accident. If it makes you feel better, it was only a few weeks ago.”

“This is not a laughing matter. You were supposed to be great.” He snapped. “You were supposed to fix all this, I had faith in you and this is how you repay me? This? Is this a joke to you, throwing your lot in with the people who murdered your mentor?”

Tommy reeled away, taken back with the sudden sheer hatred that radiated from the armoured man in front of him. The words shredded past any thin veneer of confidence he’d regained, suddenly he was fifteen again, feet frozen to the spot as the Warden’s anger swung at him.

“Don’t you dare talk to him like that!” Tommy spun around, staring at Lethe who’d suddenly burst out of hiding. “You have no right!”

“You-.” The realisation dawned with horror across the Warden’s voice, but he didn’t get the chance to say another word.

“How dare you, after everything you’ve done. He worked so hard for you, he would have died for you. He took a bullet for me after you sent us into a death trap, he worked twice as hard, he was braver than you ever were.” Lethe spat. “Don’t you dare think you have any right to tell him what he did was wrong when you let us die!”

“You betrayed us.” He breathed.

“I wasn’t ever yours.” Ranboo spat right back. “You just let an untrained, untested apprentice into all your meetings and all your files because you thought I was too scared to act out, don’t act like this wasn’t your fault, like you have someone else you can blame.”

The Warden ignored him, turning to Tommy, meeting his gaze with a surprising confidence. “You’re just a tool to them, you know that. You mean nothing to him. To any of them.”

“He has my back.” Tommy said simply. “And I have his. You wouldn’t know what it’s like.”

“Is that what they told you? They used you! To get closer to the Agency, to me!” His eyes were burning with an almost feverish light, like some old paranoia had been realised. He looked unhinged, eyes bulging in some desperate last stand of a mad man.

Tommy took a step back. “You’re not thinking straight.”

“I know exactly what I’m thinking.” His eyes narrowed. “Puffy put you on the Lethe case. Both of you.”

“Theseus had no idea.” Lethe said, amused. “And neither did Puffy.”

The ram hybrid was wearing an odd expression. She’d made no move to intervene on the confrontation, in fact no one had. Tommy had half expected the room to erupt into a fight but instead it lay equal, the Syndicate fanned out on the ground floor, the Agency heroes pouring into around the stairs and the balconies of the upper floor, listening intently, alert but not interfering.

There was a kind of stalemate, they had the upper ground but fear held them back, and with Achilles in the centre there was no guarantee their powers would work. Both sides were shifting uneasily,

waiting for any kind of sign, a wrong move, anything at all that could send the tension erupting into chaos. It was more than a miracle that it hadn't already

"Did you?" The Warden demanded, addressing the Captain directly. "Did you know?"

"I know who he is to them." She didn't look at him at all, watching Thanatos. "Archangel left the files on his desk back when it happened. But I didn't have a clue about this."

"They're not here about that. They're here about the stuff that got leaked." Tommy interrupted, trying to head off anything more before it was said, still fearing the backlash if they knew but he didn't need to worry. The Warden's fury whipped back around to him without any need for further distraction

"And what will you have us do. Rush the streets, kill every Enforcer we see, send this whole nation spiralling into more chaos, and more destruction?" The Warden demanded. "What this city needs right now is order, and continuity, this will destroy everything I've worked for, we worked for. You've seen what they've done, you've seen the damage they've caused to all of us, they'll make you into a monster."

"If I'm a monster, I'm one you made." Tommy retorted, almost surprising himself again with the sudden boldness.

There was some kind of melancholy in that moment, head to head on the floor of the tower he loved once, staring with hatred at a man he once looked up to. Now he saw the cracks in the mask, the wretchedness of a man fighting with all his strength to deny the consequences of his own actions.

In a way, he understood. He could see the way the Warden's actions had eaten away at him, he was a shadow of the man Tommy had known, his arguments fell flat, he looked unkempt, dark bags under his eyes but still he couldn't admit his guilt, and still he wouldn't back down.

Somehow, Tommy had held onto a pathetic hope he could be saved. After everything, some last shred of him wanted it to all be alright again, that maybe Sam, not the Warden but Sam would understand his choice, that maybe even he would side with them in one last desperate fight, that their goals would align just for a little while.

In those moments, that hope died, and with that melancholy came grief, as if it had struck him again all of a sudden how old and young he was, the naive, hopeful Tommy of a year ago suddenly so far away, long out of reach before he even knew what he'd lost. He seemed to be out of time over and over again before he even knew he had it.

He felt too old, too aware, the centre point of a world spinning around him too fast for him to understand, the crowd of people seeming to blur. He stared at the floor, feeling the many eyes of the room burn into him, his rush of confidence deserting him.

"At least look at me. If you stand by what you've done, at least have the nerve to look me in the eye." The Warden said bitterly.

Theseus took a deep breath, letting it sit heavy in his chest before pushing, meeting his gaze with a steely steadiness. "Happy now?"

"Why?"

“You’ve got some nerve asking that after everything you’ve done.”

“Everything I’ve done, I’ve done for us.” He spread his arm to the room, to the scattering of people all transfixed on the scene playing out in front of them, like some kind of twisted stage play. “But I know you can’t understand that.”

His sheer arrogance sent a rush of anger through Tommy, even in the face of everything crumbling apart he didn’t even seem ashamed, and suddenly the fires of the hospital were burning in front of his eyes again and he saw red.

“You thought letting them do whatever they wanted to us was going to get us freedom? What the fuck were you thinking! I mean I’m a kid but I fuckin’ know that leading people to their deaths is fucked up, how can you stand here after letting him blow up a hospital with that smug grin on your face like you’re not a goddamn murderer.” The venom spilled off his tongue, taking a step towards the Warden without even noticing, fists balled.

“I fought for so long to protect all of you, and this is what I get for it.”

“You didn’t protect us from anything. You were part of the problem, you were always part of the problem and I was too fucking blind to see it!” The Warden looked strangely composed now, swinging violently between two extremes, watching Tommy with a blank expression as if accepting of whatever fate was to come.

“We both think we’re right.” He said simply. “And that’s the most dangerous thought of all.”

“You’re delusional.”

“I could say the same of you. That’s how it is, every villain is the hero of their own story.”

“I think I heard that before.” Tommy said, glancing at Techno with the very softest edge of a smile. “But in a very different context.”

“We both want what’s best for the people we care about.”

“I want you dead.” Tommy spat, surprising himself with his conviction. “For everyone you hurt, everyone you killed, all the people you sent to die, I want you dead.”

“You don’t mean that.”

“Icarus.” Phil said quietly. “Enough.”

“You killed Rose and you dare set foot in here.” The Warden tried to regain control of the situation, clearly trying to escalate it into a fight.

“Rose wasn’t one of us.” Thanatos explained calmly. “She’s dead yes, but we couldn’t save her, and Enforcers killed her, not us. Never us.”

“If you couldn’t save her, what can you save.”

“Her action, her sacrifice is the only reason we have the information we do now. She brought about your downfall.” Nemesis told him. “And I know she would have been so proud to have done it.”

Tommy’s eyes drifted to the Captain. The hybrid was fighting to keep a blank expression, tears welling in her eyes but somehow she managed, drawing herself together. “What’s your plan?” She asked. “Why are you here, what do you want with us.”

“The plan is to get you all out of here before they send Enforcers to swamp the place.” Phil told her. “They’re already on their way, the order was given for your arrests twenty minutes ago. My boys can hold them off for a bit.”

“All our arrests?” Purpled called down.

“His arrest, and you all to be locked in here until a pending decision is made.” Phil corrected. “Which will inevitably end in either arrest, or worse. So I’m here to offer a choice, you either go down with his burning ship, or you get out there and you do what heroes are meant to do, without him.” The sheer disgust in his voice send chills down Tommy’s spine even though it wasn’t aimed at him, the older man’s eyes fixed on the Warden. “And keep the people safe from whatever violence is coming with the revolution.”

“You want us to join you.” Punz laughed at him. “You must be joking.”

“Not join.” Phil corrected. “Although the offer is there, if you want it. But just get out there and do your job, no matter what Enforcers say.”

“And make my case worse? No thank you.” Punz turned away dismissively but Purpled grabbed his arm.

“He’s right. We’re fucked either way.”

“At least he’s not trying to kill us.” Eryn quipped. “I like this.”

Already there was a shift in the room. It was like they’d felt the power change hands, the Warden shamed and silenced in the centre, staring around at the people he’d once called allies. The unrest and unease in the meeting room was bubbling, Tommy almost had to applaud Phil for the genius.

The Syndicate had swooped in when the Agency was weakest. They were looking between Phil and Puffy now, not yet in agreement with either but their curiosity piqued and looking for leadership in all the uncertainty. Puffy let go of the bannister slowly, Blaze edging a little closer.

“You can’t be serious. You’ve turned crazy old man.” The Warden told Phil. There was something bitter in that, a lost comradeship they both remembered, words that might have been lighthearted once now carried a damning weight. “You’ll drag us all down to your grave.”

“I’m not the one who did this.” Phil replied, perfectly calm. “Say what you like, make me your hero, make me your villain, you can’t give back what you stole from me and I won’t let you take what’s mine.” He continued. “Scream for help, call the police, call the Enforcers, put blame on everyone but yourself, they won’t get past the combined Syndicate, they won’t get even close. It’s over Sam, surrender while you still can.”

“Is this fun for you?” The Warden’s grip tightened on his trident. “Are you proud of what you’ve done, of the damage you’ve caused.” He moved to raise his trident but Phil just held up a warning finger, as if chastising a child

“Ah ah. I wouldn’t do that if I was you.”

Lethe’s hand strayed to his knife, Achilles taking a threatening step forward. It was almost comical the way he towered over Phil, who looked almost meek in his smaller stature but was nothing of the kind, eyes burning with an almost fanatical conviction that Tommy was more used to seeing in Orpheus than in the older man.

“Is this all this is, some pathetic attempt at revenge.” The Warden mocked him.

“You weren’t listening to anything I said, were you.” He said icily. “Even now, it always has to be about you.”

“You have no right to police what I say.” Sam hissed. “I’m not taking anything from a man who hid away for half his life and now comes crawling back to try and undermine me when I have worked so hard to rebuild everything you broke.”

“Tell that to their graves.” Phil waved his hand at the wall, at the pictures, the memorials, the faces of dead heroes staring back at him. “Maybe it’ll bring them some comfort.” He turned away dismissively, addressing the room instead. “I’m not about to spout some with us or against us nonsense. You’re with us, or you go home and get the hell out of this country while you can.”

“Don’t need to ask me twice.” Eryn hopped over the bannister, dropping down to the lobby floor. “Where do you need me?”

“You’ll die.” The Warden warned him.

“Yeah dunno if you’ve heard of it but some of us would rather risk our own skin than others.” He popped a piece of gum in his mouth, turning back to Phil. “If Theseus trusts you, you’re probably not all bad.”

Purpled was next, following Eryn down, a little more wary of the hulking figure of Achilles. It almost made Tommy laugh, knowing behind that terrifying figure and bleached skull mask was Techno, kind gentle Techno, who waited every weekend in a bookshop for a brother he might never see again.

“I’m getting out of here.” Fundy mumbled. “Good luck to all of you but I’m shit in a fight.” He hesitated, as if expecting to be cut down mid exit, like they’d lied about letting him go free all along, but nothing came. He vanished out the door before Puffy got out a whispered goodbye.

“Android?” Niki asked quietly. The cyborg was hovering on the stairs, a little uncomfortable.

“This isn’t my fight.”

The Warden’s eyes lit up in triumph, but before he could say anything else Android waved his hand. “I don’t care about the Syndicate.” He said bluntly. “But if you’re going to land us in jail, I don’t care

about you either. Good luck fighting this war, I don't owe you jackshit." He grinned a little at his own joke.

"They can shut you down." Sam threatened. "I can send one word and you're gone."

Tommy's eyes flickered over to Jack in utter shock, who gave a kind of lopsided smile without any humour. "Oh you thought I wanted to be here, doing this miserable job."

"You're a meta Jack." Niki said flatly. "You can't just run away from this."

"Who the fuck are you to tell me what to...." He trailed off. "Oh. *Oh.* "

"Tsunami?" Blaze lowered his hands. "No. Tsunami is that you?"

Niki nodded quietly. "The Syndicate, they're not who you think they are, I promise. I can't explain, there's no time but please. Major is alive, Archangel is alive, they're our only hope right now."

The shock rippled through, and he could tell most of them didn't believe it but something, something in Niki's plea moved them, just a little, just enough.

Android took another few steps down, eyes darting between the Syndicate and the Warden, who was watching with a kind of frozen horror as his world crumbled around him. And then suddenly, he wasn't frozen anymore, lunging for Jack, reaching for his metal arm. Tommy felt cold run down his spine, remembering the strength with which the gauntlet had crumpled the metal of the radio not an hour earlier.

"Stop!" He reacted instinctively. The Warden's fist stopped moments from Jack's shoulder, a crazed light in the former hero's eyes. Time seemed to hang in the air for a second, before it exploded, picking Sam right up off his feet and throwing him across the floor, leaving a trail of red light behind him

Tommy stared at his hands half in horror at what he'd done, but he barely got time to think about what he'd done before Sam scrambled to his feet. Orpheus was faster, darting across the room, slamming his fist into the Warden's face with no warning, sending him staggering back, his eyes a little unfocused.

"That was for Archangel." Wilbur hissed.

A second punch right to the jaw, Tommy could almost hear Sam's neck snapping back. It sent him reeling, slamming back against the bannister with a loud crash. "And that was from my brother," Orpheus whispered, almost too low to hear.

"Leave him." Nemesis said softly, one of the few seemingly unsurprised by Orpheus's sudden display of violence, something very uncharacteristic for him. "It's not worth it now."

“I’m done. That’s all. *Stand still* .” The Warden froze against his will, still a little dazed. Wilbur stole the handcuffs off his belt, looping them around the pole behind him and clipping them onto Sam’s wrists before he could slip away. “*Don’t move*. ”

“What if people come in.” Niki picked up the trident, testing the weight of it in her hand, and Orpheus nodded towards it.

“You might need a weapon.”

“There’s innocent blood on this. I want nothing of it.” She turned, bringing her arm around with an impressive force, letting it fly from her hand right at the Warden.

Tommy’s heart stopped in his throat, but the trident sunk into the floorboards several inches deep, right by Sam’s arm. His eyes were wide in absolute terror, staring at the quivering prongs inches from his fingers.

“Go get ready Icarus, Lethe.” Nemesis didn’t look at him. “We’ll meet you outside.” He could only nod weakly.

Lethe teleported down to him, pulling him into a sudden hug. “Oh my gosh. We did it.”

“That’s it?” He asked, feeling strangely hollow.

“That’s it. Now we see what they choose.” Ranboo confirmed.

“That was. Fast.”

“We don’t have time. Go get ready, hurry.” Lethe pushed him towards the locker room. “You don’t want to be in that gear when they arrive.”

The locker room seemed so far away all of a sudden. His legs felt leaden as he walked, as if weighted down, the stairs stretching out as faces he’d known for years parted before him, keeping a wary distance, their expressions mixed with fear but also curiosity. They looked at him almost the same way he once looked at the Syndicate except, not quite, just enough that he wasn’t afraid they’d hurt him, but still, it was with a kind of unease.

In some, there were even a few shreds of respect. Blaze gave him a slow nod as he walked past, Purpled giving him a surprisingly warm smile.

“About time.” He whispered. Tommy opened his mouth to reply, but nothing came out.

He ducked into the locker room, an escape from the stares, from the strange silence, alone at last with the weight of what he’d done. He changed as quickly as he could, peeling his Agency uniform off his skin almost with revulsion now, staring at the stylized A on his chestplate with a kind of vengeance.

He’d never get that better uniform that Niki promised. He’d never have a graduation, he’d probably

never set foot in this room again. He slid on his Syndicate mask, balled up the Theseus suit, and tossed it into the trashcan in the hallway on his way out. He didn't look back.

Chapter End Notes

Well. There it is.



fan art of WHT!Niki by the amazing @niimro on twitter, here's the [original tweet](#) !



fan art of chapter 31 by @652Phantom on twitter, here's the [original tweet](#) !

Welcome Home Theseus



and finally art by the returning @blustrasa on twitter, here's the [original tweet](#)!



and more Blue art of WHT!Niki with JOM!Niki and TINAAOS!Niki, both amazing fics i'd recommend you read, here's the [original tweet](#)!

Please go support all the amazing artists and if you have any WHT fan art tag me on twitter or use the [whtfanart](#) hashtag and I'll put everything submitted into the next authors note! (i promise it won't be three months this time)

So it begins Pt.1

Chapter Notes

Quick Recap as I've been gone for a while, also if you're livetweeting remember to tag WHT spoilers!!!!

- Ranboo and Tommy break into a bank in order to acquire the name of the person Schlatt is hunting down to prevent classified information getting out. The break in is successful with the help of Hannah, a security guard who turns out to be the former hero Rose, and who later gives her life to secure their getaway with Niki's help.

The person they're looking for turns out to be Tubbo, who escaped his father with a briefcase of information detailing all sorts of crimes committed by Schlatt's government and the enforcers, which is vital evidence the Syndicate need to help overthrow him.

Tubbo agrees to use his insider knowledge of Schlatt to bring the dictatorship down and Wilbur takes the last quiet moment they'll get for a while to finally reveal that Tommy is in fact his younger brother, up until this point only known as Theo, who Kristin had rescued with the intention of reuniting him with his family years down the line, providing adoption paperwork he'd carried around with him for months to prove it.

Reeling with this information Tommy gets the chance to talk to Kristin, who confirms that she adopted him following the Warden separating him from Techno and Wilbur during their escape from a meta facility, and that she withheld this from him so he could get to know his family on his own terms.

The next day Ranboo and Tommy go to the Agency undercover, attending one final meeting in order to infiltrate and see what the Warden's reaction to his crimes being exposed is. They let the Syndicate into the building, and a confrontation follows between Tommy, the Warden and the Syndicate as the Agency watches on.

Wilbur uses his powers to silence the Warden, and Theseus leaves to get changed into his Syndicate clothes, the remaining Agency heroes making no move to attack. He throws away his Theseus uniform in the bathroom bin.

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Blaze and Spark had raided the canteen, rolling down gas canisters they must have taken from behind the stove, he could only assume to fuel whatever fire they had planned. Jack and Fundy were long gone, vanishing into the early morning darkness.

Tommy walked down the stairs to the lobby slowly, not sure if he was putting off the inevitable questions or savouring the moment, all too aware of the eyes on him, drilling into his back, his skull.

He remembered the first time he'd walked down these stairs in his hero uniform, how they'd clapped and cheered. There was none of that now, no boy in a uniform too big for him, the sleeves slipping over his arms. No plastic armour, his communicator lay in the bin with his uniform.

He didn't recognise himself, and yet he felt more himself than he ever had. He was the most vulnerable he'd ever felt but seeing Techno and Wilbur and Niki waiting for him at the foot of the stairs somehow he wasn't afraid.

Tommy reached the lobby, barely sparing a glance for the limp shape of the Warden at the side. He turned to Phil, quietly searching for some kind of approval in the older man's expression. Phil gave him a quiet nod, the edge of a smile tugging at his mouth.

"How long do we have?"

"Anywhere between ten minutes and an hour honestly." Phil replied. "I have no way of knowing."

"This is when we need Jack." Puffy said wryly, watching from a small distance. "He'd be able to tell us."

"Well Jack's not here. He ran off." Tommy shot back, a little more harshly than he meant to. "Sorry. What can I do?"

"Not much I'm afraid." He looked over at Puffy. "She's taken command of the Tower, ask her."

"It should have been you." Puffy said it so quietly he thought he heard her wrong.

"Should have was ten years ago." Phil replied stiffly. "I think whatever should have happened then is long dead and buried." He made it very clear the conversation was closed, and he was right, there was no time for reminiscing.

"The current plan is to wait, hand over the Warden as a peace offering and if they try to come after the rest of us..." Puffy relayed.

"They will." Phil interrupted, tapping his fingers on his cane, his tone matter of fact.

"We won't act until they provoke us." Puffy argued back. "You can, we can't. Anyway, Blaze and Spark have fuel ready if they need to attack, Punz is...not keen on this. Purpled knows where to go to get a clear shot, your people, I don't know what they're doing."

He knew the your people was aimed at Phil, but it still stung just a little. He knew he'd chosen his side but it felt like he wasn't one of them anymore. He wasn't, but at the same time he was, Theseus and Icarus blurring faster in his head. It was all very confusing.

"I heard my name?" Eryn poked his head over. Tommy almost flinched at the sudden movement, waiting for the harsh words or accusing tone he'd convinced himself was coming. The adults stepped away, quietly sensing they needed some time alone.

"New look." Purpled said at long last. "Suits you I guess." Eryn elbowed him, earning him a very disproportionately hard punch in the shoulder back.

"That's probably the nicest thing you've ever said." Eryn retorted, choosing wisely not to escalate the physical fight as they all knew it would probably end up in him flat on the floor.

A long pause followed, the four boys looking at each other, waiting for someone to say something first.

“It’s....weird.” Eryn said at last. “I feel like we should be fighting you. Everything I know is telling me you should be halfway to Pandora right now and I should be helping.”

Tommy shuddered slightly. “Don’t remind me. I don’t wanna think about that place right now. Not with everything.”

“I feel like we should be panicking more? The Warden just got beat up, there’s Enforcers on the way and we’re just kind of...hanging around.” Eryn made some kind of helpless motion with his hands. “I don’t think anyone knows what’s happening or what we’re meant to be doing.”

“Find yourself a hiding place and get ready for a fight.” Phil said simply. “If there’s somewhere in the city you can use as a safehouse in the event of a warrant being put out for you, get ready to run to it. Prepare for the worst.”

“Don’t scare my staff.” Puffy said stiffly. “We still don’t know...”

“If you refuse to admit what you know, at least let the children be ready for it.” He shot back, just as tersely. There was a low, underlying tension between them, the strange echoes of whatever their friendship had been warping it. Puffy was clearly wrestling with her younger self that looked up to Phil, versus the acknowledgement that she was now the one in charge, with him as an equal.

She backed down, acknowledging his point with a tilt of her head but nothing more. Eryn looked between them both, a little confused but decided to not to comment for once.

“I uh. I’m going to go talk to my brother.” He turned, making a beeline for Blaze on the other side of the hall.

“Lethe, go keep a lookout with Orpheus.” Phil ordered. “Achilles and Nemesis bar the exits. Icarus...”

“I’ll stay here.” Tommy offered. “I know the Agency best, they trust me.”

He peeled away, leaving Puffy and Tommy alone.

“You know, this is the busiest I’ve seen this place in years.” Puffy said softly. “Irony isn’t it.” She shook her head slowly, looking around. “It’s too big for us. I remember when it was full, when there were people rushing up and down the stairs, and when the army instructor came in every morning. He had a thermos flask of coffee, he’d give me some sometimes. Back when they actually cared about us.”

“Did they ever care, really?”

“It was good once.” Puffy said sadly. “It really was. There were people that cared, there still are.”

She turned back to him. There was something hovering the back of her expression, something she was trying to tell him but hadn’t quite got the nerve.

“You said you saw the documents about my family. That uh, Archangel left them out.” Tommy said slowly.

“Theseus...”

“Tell me.” Tommy turned on her. “Tell me the truth.”

“You know the truth. I- I knew the truth.” She said at length. Her hands were shaking a little, not quite able to meet his gaze. Tommy took a step closer.

“You never said anything. You let him fill my head with all fuckin’ kinds of poison and you did nothing.” He whispered. Puffy’s arms slumped to her sides in defeat, clearly lost for anything to do or say.

“I’m sorry, I really am.”

“Were there others? Anyone else with families they don’t know about?”

“Not that I know of. Listen, I would have given anything to change it all, I would give anything to turn it all back and try again but with a backbone this time. I’m sorry I didn’t do enough.”

“I was a kid.” It came out plaintive, but he didn’t care. “I am a kid. You let him walk over us and you *knew* .”

“I was afraid.” Puffy whispered. “We all were. And after you just lost Niki, you were so angry, and I was so lost. I did what I could to try and guide you towards the truth but I couldn’t say it.”

Tommy slumped down on the stairs. “I’m sorry. I’m just angry. I don’t know why; it won’t change shit.”

A fleeting, aching sadness crossed her expression and she reached out towards him, before snatching her hand away. “You’re growing too fast, you would never have said that a year ago.”

“Yeah there’s a lot of shit I wouldn’t have said a year ago.” He admitted wryly. “Kinda how it goes when you throw your lot in with what everyone thinks is a terrorist group.”

“We’re a lot alike.” She told him. “Just kids who lost our mentors. I’m glad they found you and helped you, that you had good role models. I didn’t have the same chances and by the time I realised it was too late. I accepted my fate, but you never gave up.”

He glanced up, almost afraid of the pride he could hear in her voice, like after everything he’d said and done today he didn’t deserve the warmth.

“It seems like yesterday that I couldn’t seem to get you to stop fighting everything and anyone, and now I’m very glad you didn’t listen to me.”

Tommy laughed bitterly at that. “Seems like everything they hated, helped in the end or something.”

“Careful.” She warned, one worried eye on him. “That same anger will eat you up if you’re not careful.”

“I know.” He replied, just as bitter. “Trust me I know.”

“Don’t be like that. Whatever happens from now on you helped change things. I don’t know how, I won’t pretend to understand what you’ve been through, but you’ve done what generations of us couldn’t. I know they’d all be proud of you.” He knew she meant the old heroes, even if she couldn’t seem to say it.

“They didn’t know me.”

“But I do.” She sighed. “I don’t know what I can say to make it better.”

“You can be honest, that’s a good start.” That was a little sarcastic, but he felt he deserved it. He looked up slightly at her, a churning sea of mixed emotions in his chest. “Why does this feel like a goodbye?”

Puffy said nothing for a while, before sighing heavily, folding her arms. “Is she coming over?” She asked at long last, watching Niki by the door.

“What, are you going to say goodbye to her too.” Tommy said sarcastically, before flinching a little. “Sorry.”

“I didn’t get to say goodbye last time. I’m glad you got that time but I didn’t.” The reply was a little sharp but Tommy kinda deserved it.

“I didn’t know. They didn’t tell me they saved her, I swear.” Some of the distrust in Puffy’s eyes softened.

“Really?”

“Really. I’ve only been with them for like, a few weeks. They didn’t tell me, and she couldn’t leave the safe place she was hiding in, I had no idea, you know me and my big mouth, I’d have said some dumb shit if I knew.” He tried a lopsided smile.

She looked as if she was about to ask more but she didn’t get the chance.

“We’ve got incoming.” Achilles’s voice rumbled into his ear. Tommy’s heart stopped dead. He must have looked something like a deer in headlights because Purpled and Eryn immediately knew what was said, even though only the Syndicate heard.

“What’s the situation.” Phil replied calmly, the others moving closer to listen.

“Multiple armed Enforcer trucks, they’re closing the street off.”

“They don’t need that just for him.” Phil’s eyes were sharp, though he kept his tone mellow. It worked all the same, Puffy sighing heavily.

“Maybe they’re being overcautious, arresting metas is tricky. Don’t try and undermine me, please. We wait and see what they do.”

“It was an observation.” Phil replied, completely neutral. “Your people need to find a place to hide.”

“Everybody lay low. We see why they’re here, if they’re only here for the Warden I’ll talk to them, but if they’re not it’s better to be safe than sorry.” Puffy relayed to the others. There was a scramble to hide, Punz vanishing upstairs, Blaze and Eryn following suite.

Phil turned to Tommy, winking at him, before twisting the handle of his cane. It came away, pulling up a little to reveal nothing less than a long thin blade hidden inside. The boy blinked, taken completely off guard. “Really?”

“Wilbur brought it for me a few years ago, he thought it would be funny.” Phil said dryly. “And for lack of any better weapons I’ll take it.”

“Come on.” Lethe hissed, stood near the Warden, motioning for him to get moving. Tommy bolted up the stairs, making for a hidden alcove above one of the balconies he used to hide in when he didn’t want to do training. Purpled had clearly had the same idea, hiding himself under a dust sheet covering some boxes inside one of the cupboards.

Thanatos lingered for one second, leaning heavily on his cane. He seemed much older, the lines on his face growing deeper as he looked at his former friend lying prone at the foot of the stairs. He knelt down, tilting the Warden’s head up.

“Remember my face.” He said quietly. “I want them to know it was me.”

Phil lingered for a moment, two, before pushing himself up and taking Lethe’s outstretched hand, the younger helping him up the stairs.

The Agency were watching the exit, the Syndicate were watching Phil, making sure he was alright, already knowing perfectly well what was going to come through that door so they didn’t need to look. There was always someone hovering at his shoulder, either Lethe or Orpheus, Achilles glancing back now and then from his watch just to keep an eye on him.

It was a quiet loyalty, but a certain one. They all knew Phil could more than handle his own but still they watched his back and each others, and now Tommy’s too.

Something about that unwavering trust settled his nerves a little, he found it much easier to be calm knowing Achilles’s steady gaze had tracked his every footstep to his hiding place, knew Techno would come in swinging if anything threatened him.

The lights flickered off, plunging the lobby into darkness, Spark shoving the cupboard hiding their combat preparations closed before ducking for cover.

They’d all had this training, get above or below the line of sight of whoever was hunting you, make sure there’s escape routes, it was everything he’d talked through a hundred times with Kristin in case the Enforcers came to their house except now it was real, and in the place he’d once thought he was safe.

He ducked inside the same cupboard as Purpled, clambering up to one of the higher shelves. He pressed his eye against the crack in the door, watching the floor below. There was a few long beats of silence, his breath coming loud and heavy in the stillness.

Trucks roared outside, too many for him to count the engines. He could hear voices call back and forth, and then quiet again.

It was shattered moments later, the door coming crashing down. Rhythmic stomping of steel tipped boots following.

Beams of light cut into the room, sweeping back and forth looking for signs of life, slicing through the darkness, the air filled with dust and smoke. Ghosts appeared, silhouetted in the doorway, fully armoured Enforcers, the rams head on their shoulders gleaming in the half light, wearing bulletproof armour and helmets that obscured any part of their faces.

Any last veneer of safety from the Enforcers because of their similar line of work was shattered, the same old fear flooding over him that he'd known as a child.

He felt like a deer in headlights. It was like Eret's bookshop all over again, every instinct telling him to run but he stayed put, grounded by the invisible presence of the Syndicate, of his family all around him.

A flashlight beam slid over the Warden's face and stopped, sliding back to focus on him. One of the Enforcers rushed forward, taking what looked like power suppression bands off their belt. Tommy felt his stomach drop a little, remembering the strange icy cold that had crawled over his skin when they'd put them on him, the odd vague feeling of loss.

It wasn't something he'd wish on anyone, but they didn't have any choice

"Be careful. It may be a trap." A voice snapped out, a captain of some kind.

"Copy that." The Enforcers spread out into an arc, scanning the area. A beam of light swept near his head and Tommy resisted the urge to duck, knowing the sudden movement would give him away in an instant. His heart was in this throat, Eryn holding onto his arm for dear life.

"Looks clear. Spread out, keep your eyes peeled."

They began to search, tossing around furniture and busting open doors, leaving no stone unturned but they were too slow, too new. The Agency knew this place like the back of their hand, Tommy knew every hiding spot in the building, he had to. They found nothing.

"All quiet sir."

"They should be here. Command said there was an all units call for a meeting, they should be pinned down, easy pickings." He heard Purpled shift at that, both clearly hearing the underlying threat but there was nothing else.

One of them swore quietly. "Someone must have tipped them off."

"Not by the look of this guy." The leader knelt down, peeling the Warden's eyelids up to see if he was alive.

"They ditched him and saved their own skins?"

"Sure looks like it." Their voices were hollow and echoing out of the masks, weirdly inhuman.

Enforcers were slowly creeping up the stairs, guns swinging back and forth, the safety off. Tommy's heart pounded in his chest, watching as they burst through the doors, sweeping methodically back and forth, floor by floor.

He wondered how many times they'd done this before, how many meta hideouts they'd raided, hunted down their inhabitants like it was nothing. It dragged on and on, he lost all sense of time, steel toed boots stomped back and forth.

Click, click, closer and closer. An Enforcer was approaching their balcony, a beam of light swinging back and forth, almost outside their hiding spot. Purpled didn't say a thing, but a hand wrapped around Tommy's forearm, becoming tighter and tighter, so tight it almost hurt.

Then he was right in front of them. Tommy was almost sick, time seeming to stretch out.

The cupboard doors were flung open, a flashlight aimed directly at them. Tommy moved to defend himself but the grip on his arm yanked him back.

He turned to look at Purpled in shock but there was nothing there at all.

Where his arm, his hands were supposed to be, there was nothing but empty air. He looked down, his feet were the same. He was completely invisible. And the Enforcer didn't move to attack either, his flashlight swinging over them it was like he saw nothing at all.

Tommy was so frozen in shock and confusion that by the time he regained any kind of idea of how to fight the Enforcer was already moving away, letting the doors swing shut, leaving them in the darkness again.

Tommy tried to breathe but it came out as a squeak. The soldier spun around, but still saw nothing. He shined his torch into the darkness, ducking his head down to get a better look under the cupboard.

They both heard the click as the safety switch on his gun snapped off. Purpled's breath hitched, Tommy reaching for the broom in the middle of the cupboard as a makeshift weapon if he had to protect them both. He could hear Purpled's breathing shaking, the usually stoic boy clearly just as shaken.

"We're just hiding from class, like we always did." He dared a soft whisper, battling through his own panic to calm the other boy. "That's all. Puffy's going to come find us in a second."

Purpled didn't reply, didn't respond in any way but his breathing slowed, just a little. The Enforcer shoved over cabinet next to them, sending it crashing to the ground, poking his gun through the contents that spilled out of it, but he found nothing.

He moved on, and Purpled's grip on his arm relaxed a little. Tommy watched through the tiny gap in the door as the Warden was dragged to his feet and handcuffed, still dazed. They pulled him towards the entrance, almost having to carry him in his lethargic state.

An Enforcer passed Wilbur's hiding place, and slowed, tilting his head as if listening to something. "Sir there's nothing here." He called out in an oddly mechanical voice. "They're gone."

"Well search the rest of the building goddamnit. Maybe they're upstairs."

"No sir. No sign of them."

“They have to be in here somewhere, we know they haven’t left.”

“Stop.” The Enforcer that was studying Sam earlier had come back, still with a puzzled look on his face. He peeled Sam’s eyelids up, pointing his flashlight directly at the meta’s eyes, pausing, before snatching his hand away a moment later, jumping back. “Get out! Get out!”

“Sir?”

“He’s awake. Dilated pupils, he can’t move. It’s a trap!” He snatched his radio off his belt, almost dropping it in his haste. “Suspected syndicate attack, abandon positions, do you copy, do you copy.”

Tommy could hear the raw fear in his voice, see the panic with which the other Enforcers scrambled, dropping everything to run to the stairs. They turned from slow and sinister, hunting through the darkness to a panicked wave

Instead of echoing that panic as he once would have it gave him a surge of adrenaline. It almost scared him, how their fear made him bolder, how he fed off it, how it put a smile across his face but with everything he had seen, everything he now knew, he couldn’t find it in himself to feel all that bad about it.

“Hold your positions.” Phil said softly. “Let’s not provoke them.”

“They just ran out of the building squealing.” Tommy reported. “I think it’s a bit late for that.”

The Enforcer by Wilbur hadn’t moved. Tommy saw him stop, turn, and then nod once, his eyes glazing over.

“I said don’t provoke them Orpheus.” Phil whispered over their earpieces, clearly having seen it too. The last of them vanished out the door. Tommy didn’t even wait, bursting from the cupboard, turning on Purpled with wide eyes.

“Wh-. What was that?”

“You’re not the only one with surprises.” Purpled replied, his tone flat, staring in the direction they’d left.

“But you’re supposed to be a sharpshooter?” Tommy asked, bewildered. “You just turned...invisible?”

“You’re not supposed to be with the Syndicate.” Purpled retorted. “We don’t exactly tell each other all our secrets do we.”

“Touche.” Tommy had no response to that really. “Did they...”

“Don’t be stupid, of course they didn’t know. You think I want that kind of attention on me.”

He was reeling, looking at the other boy with new eyes. “All the times you were late or no one could find you or...”

“Man, we’re really dealing with a genius here.” Purpled wore the very edge of a tight lipped smile. “Yeah. No one pays attention to me dude, it was easy.”

Tommy didn’t stop staring. Purpled walked on a few more steps before stopping, feeling the eyes on the back of his neck. He turned back, shrugging slightly. “They knew I was a meta, they just didn’t know what, so I trained hard, and I lied. If they knew, I wouldn’t be here, I’d be up in Sunflower or something. Any more stupid questions?”

“Uh. No.”

“Good. It stays between us.” He made it clear the topic was closed. Tommy nodded mutely, staring after him. Lethe was waiting up ahead, watching Purpled, clearly having overheard the exchange. His expression was unreadable under his mask but he was oddly still.

“What.” Purpled snapped at him, a little defensive.

“A lot about you is suddenly making sense.” Ranboo said carefully.

“Like him, you zip it.” Purpled threatened him. “I didn’t keep it quiet this long for the Syndicate to fuckin out me.”

Lethe, wisely, said nothing, just inclined his head in quiet agreement. His attention quickly turned to Tommy, seeing his friend trailing back. “You alright?”

“M okay.” He mumbled. “Don’t worry about me. Looks like we got something.” He pointed below.

The Enforcer near Wilbur had remained behind, staring blankly into the distance, completely frozen. Blaze cut a wary circle around him, eyeing him nervously.

Eryn had no such qualms, walking right up to him, seeing if he could pull the silver rams head off the soldiers shoulder. There was no luck, it was sewn on. He glared at it for a second and then ignited a spark on his finger, burning away the threads holding it in place.

He held it up triumphantly only for Blaze to grab his arm, dragging him away. Orpheus strode up to the Enforcer, folding his arms, waiting for Puffy who came running towards him. Her expression was contorted in stress.

“You shouldn’t have done that, they’ll come looking for him.” She wrung her hands together anxiously, pacing back and forth. “Oh my god.” Orpheus just shrugged casually, waiting.

“What do you want to know?” He asked. She didn’t reply, running her hand through her hair, taking silent count to make sure everyone was there. Orpheus turned to the Enforcer. *“Why did you come here.”*

The Enforcer glared pure murder at him, the reply torn from between gritted teeth. “To...to secure the building.”

“He’s resisting it.” Orpheus explained. “Some Enforcers have undergone training to resist it. We’ll have to be quick.”

“Ask him what his orders were.” Puffy said quietly. Orpheus turned to look at her, eyes flicking to Phil to check if he agreed before nodding.

“*What were your orders?*” He said it louder this time, and presumably more forceful.

“Secure Theseus, bring him back to Central Command. Dispose of spare Agency members, they serve no further use. Report to Central Command that metahumans had put up a fight to defend their leader and that we had to resort to self defence.” The Enforcer reported in the same, flat tone.

Puffy visibly paled but she held her composure with a steely grace. Phil, to his credit didn’t look triumphant, if anything his posture sunk a little with the verbal confirmation of what he already knew. Puffy glanced at him, but he didn’t try and say he warned her, he didn’t have to.

“Get him out of here.” Phil said shortly. “Quickly. Before they come back and look for him.”

“*Go back to your squad, act normal. Disable their communications.*”

The Enforcer ran down the stairs, and Orpheus stepped back, clasping his hands behind his back. There was a few moments of silence as everyone processed what just happened, both what had been said and the eerie sight of Orpheus’s abilities at work.

“Why do they want you? Do they know?” Eryn demanded. Ice trailed down Tommy’s spine.

“That he’s one of us? No.” Phil answered for him. “But they think they can use him against us.”

“Why?”

“It doesn’t matter.” Puffy cut them off, her voice stronger, more decisive. She seemed to have made up her mind, taking command. “You heard him. They want us dead.”

“No shit sherlock.” Purpled leaned against the bannister. “What’s new.”

“Up until now we could at least rely on Schlatt not being ready to make his move. But he’s made it now, we aren’t safe, not here, not anywhere in this country. So we have a choice, you can leave with Android and Fundy, or you can stay and we hear the Syndicate out and see if they can help us.”

“The spare Agency members.” Eryn repeated, in way of response. “We’re just spares.”

“We serve no more use.” Purpled repeated, just as coldly. He tilted his head up, looking at the ceiling. “About time they were honest about it.”

“So what, we side with a bunch of murderers.” Punz snorted. “Is that what you want, based on one mind controlled dummies testimony.”

“Do you think you’re better than us?” Achilles asked, his tone a low, warning rumble. Punz backed off, holding up his hands quickly, Achilles standing easily a head taller than him.

“Punz get some sense. They don’t break into the building with the safety off saying we’re pinned down in a meeting and should be ‘easy pickings’ just to say hi.” Blaze said sarcastically. “The Syndicate’s right, they did us a favour.”

“Sure, whatever, I’ll admit they’re out to get us, even if it is one rotten apple. But maybe if we wait and prove we didn’t help....”

“Rotten apples this, rotten apples that. Rotten apples don’t grow off healthy trees.” Phil cut him off before he could take that any further, and Blaze and Puffy agreed with him. “They’ll find a way to pin this on you regardless, and even if they don’t they will next time, and next time. You can’t salvage what’s been broken for years.”

“What the hell would you know?” Punz bristled, though he still had one wary eye on Achilles looming over Phil’s shoulder protectively.

“I’ll show you the scars on my fucking back where they cut the wings off me mate.” Phil’s voice was cold steel. “Don’t try and patronise me, it won’t end well for you.”

“Is that a threat?”

“Do you want to die? Or do you want to grow a backbone and join the people who’ve been resisting this government the whole time you’ve been helping them. You can run out there and die alone or you can bend your pride and accept our help, because you need us more than we need you.”

It was impressive to watch, one man with a cane and a smart green suit commanding the room with such ease. Tommy felt compelled to help, watching the tentative alliance turn back to aggression as fear began to kick in.

“You can trust them. They just saved us.” He piped up at last. “The Syndicate were the ones who got me out when the Enforcers tried to take me to Pandora a few weeks ago. They saved Tsunami, they’re the ones who released the information that’s going to take Schlatt down. This can be over.”

“The information that is about to get us killed. They think we’re rising up against them now.” Punz retorted. “That’s going to be great.”

“Doesn’t really matter does it, we’re dead either way.” Purpled glared at his mentor. “Come on man. Fuck this shit.” He snapped his butterfly knife closed, stuffing it in his belt. “I never wanted to be here.”

“I know.” Puffy said softly. “I’m sorry.”

“What do we do? We can’t leave, they’ll have eyes on all exits. And they’ll be sending backup soon. So what, we wait here until they come back and kill us for real.”

“Punz either you can shut up and go with Fundy and Android or you can stay and fight.” Puffy finally had had enough, turning on him. “We’re wasting time. Go get ready, call whoever you need, do whatever you have to do. Just go, we don’t have time for arguing.”

The Agency heroes seemed to snap into motion, suddenly given purpose, though he could still feel a lingering restment. Years of tension between the Agency and the Syndicate weren’t going to be erased in one display of allyship, they couldn’t be, but for now it worked, they had no other choice.

Eryn turned to stare at Phil, clearly slowly getting bolder and bolder as the heroes realised the Syndicate really weren’t going to try anything. “So what was that you said about wings?”

“Eryn!” Tommy said, shocked. “You can’t just say that.”

“Why not? I think it’s fair. Where are your wings?” Eryn asked stubbornly. “I want to know, ‘cause like we got no proof you are who you say you are. I want to know the truth.”

“Touchy subject.” Phil replied wryly, seeming unphased by the boy’s bluntness. “Courtesy of a certain someone.”

“Man that sucks.” Eryn said after a bit, clearly lost for a response to that.

“I don’t know, maybe I should thank him.” Phil said wryly. “Without that I wouldn’t be a millionaire right now, or have been able to establish a life for myself and my sons that would bring his whole game crumbling.”

Eryn tilted his head, trying to figure something out. “You know, you look familiar. Didn’t I see you at the Sponsors Ball...oh.” He clamped his mouth shut. Phil tapped his fingers on his cane, smiling slightly. Eryn turned to look at Tommy, narrowing his eyes.

“Nope. I didn’t know.” He defended himself quickly. Just like with Puffy he watched the tension fall a little from the other boys shoulders. It almost hurt how easily they trusted him after everything, even though he was the one they grew up with.

“You know. Theseus was obsessed with you.” Eryn piped up suddenly. He pushed his hands into his back pockets, grinning. Phil’s eyebrow raised slightly.

“You mean Archangel?”

“Yeah.” Eryn agreed, his grin growing. “He tried to make me sit through multiple documentaries about you.”

“I’m going to kill you.” Tommy covered his eyes with his hand, cheeks flaring red. “I’m going to murder you.”

“Typical Syndicate behaviour.” Purpled just rolled his eyes. “Did you know he said he asked for an Archangel themed birthday party when he was twelve.”

“I’m going to kill you!” Tommy threatened even louder. “I knew it was a bad idea to tell you that.”

“Dude, please don’t say that out of that mask.” Eryn held a hand up, looking a little unnerving. “I’m still not convinced you’re not evil.”

“The allegedly evil head of the syndicate is listening to you tell every embarrassing story from when I was *twelve*.” Tommy pointed out. “The most evil thing I’ve done is well...” He trailed off

“I don’t like that pause.” Purpled remarked, taking a butterfly blade from his pocket and beginning to play with it in a bored sort of fashion. Having known the other boy for long enough though Tommy knew it was a facade, he was nervous, far more than he liked to admit.

“Well I uh. Mighthaveusedyourlightertosetabookshoponfire.”

“Sorry say that again?” Eryn looked a little lost. “Didn’t catch that.”

Tommy took a deep breath. “I might have used your lighter to set a bookshop on fire.” The other boys just stared at him open mouthed, except Lethe who he heard snort quietly, turning away.

“Come again?” Purpled asked.

“They deserved it.” He mumbled. “Sent a dude to Pandora, were going to take me too even though I showed them my license, they were going to sell his books. He always said he’d rather they burn than be taken by Enforcers.”

“And where’s the lighter now?” Tommy just shrugged helplessly, glancing at Phil for support. Eryn patted him awkwardly on the shoulder. “If it makes you feel better I would have done the same.”

“I don’t know if that’s reassuring.” Purpled retorted.

“We need someone to stand lookout.” Phil rescued him, an understanding smile on his face, though his eyes were still crinkled in mirth. “You and Lethe set up somewhere outside and keep an eye out for any more Enforcers incoming.”

He welcomed the escape all too easily, making a beeline up the stairs towards the roof, taking the stairs two at a time. He was out of breath when he finally reached the top, using the run to take out some of the underlying tension. Lethe appeared next to him, grinning.

“You could have just asked for a lift.”

“Shut up.” Tommy staggered out onto the rooftop, pressing a hand to his chest, a little dramatic but it helped somehow. He flopped down on the floor, taking a moment to catch his breath. Lethe joined him, shutting the door softly behind them. He came closer, tilting his head in a concerned manner.

“Are you alright?” Tommy gave him a withering stare. “Right. Stupid question.”

“They were staring at me.” He adjusted his mask again, checking the straps for the millionth time, tapping it nervously.

“Is it uncomfortable?” Ranboo asked, worried. “If it’s uncomfortable you should sort it now.”

“Feels weird without my other mask. I feel exposed.”

“Nerves then.”

“Yeah.”

They fell into what was almost a comfortable silence, both taking a moment to catch their breaths. Tommy waited for his heartbeat to slow, playing with his sleeve absentmindedly.

It felt oddly peaceful, the calm before the storm. He could see lights flickering on in office buildings, and hear the distant beeping of the garbage trucks. Pigeons turned in great flocks above their heads in a rush of wings, the distant sounds of cars and ambulances echoing in the city’s usual hum.

The city was thrumming. He couldn't explain it but every stone was singing. Maybe it was the fear, maybe it was the adrenaline but it felt alive, moving for the first time since the curfews were put in place.

He stood, walking to the edge and looking down at the street far below.

"Stay out of sight." Lethe warned him.

"Bit late for that I think." He replied without looking away. He could see a boy running along, dragging his bag along behind a friend, running to catch a school bus, the yelling and laughter echoing up through the buildings.

A strange kind of regret stabbed into his heart, quiet longing for a life and an innocence he would never know, but he quashed it quickly. He flopped down, resting his back against the cold bricks. The sun was peeking above the horizon, casting them both in a soft grey light. "What do you think of all this then." Ranboo made an indifferent motion.

"I don't think, I just do things."

"Oi. That's my thing, bitch." He pushed his hands into the pockets of his, well, Techno's but his jacket now to warm his fingers a little.

"What Tubbo did takes nerve." Ranboo added after a soft pause. "I didn't think he had it in him."

Tommy sniggered at that. "Oh, so we're being toxic today."

"No! No not like that." He scrambled to rescue himself quickly. "He's been through a lot. I wouldn't blame him if he handed us the files and left but instead he's risking everything to help us."

"They're saying he's crazy."

"The files aren't crazy." Ranboo tried to reason. "They'll see."

"And if they get deleted, if they..." He had to admit, he was spiralling a little. The panic was really starting to set in, the early sunlight leaving him feeling dangerously exposed on the rooftop. All the doubts were starting to set in all at once, but he knew he was too far in to back out now.

"Covered." Lethe told him. "Phil sent all the details to friend of his across town, runs a resistance hacking group. I took a stack of files over yesterday, it's all been uploaded and distributed across multiple different servers, countries even. They can't delete this."

"You really thought of everything." The pounding in Tommy's chest faded just a little, his prior panic replaced by a kind of awe.

"Comes from plotting revenge for ten years." Ranboo wrapped his arms around his head. "I don't get it, but they do, Phil does."

“That can’t be healthy.” Tommy noted. Lethe turned to stare at him, before collapsing in abrupt laughter that echoed through the empty streets.

“You laughing at me?” Tommy said indignantly.

“You’ve got no right telling people what’s healthy or not.” Ranboo managed between chuckles. “Look at you.”

“Oh come on man.” Tommy hung his head, smiling just a little. “I wanted revenge for like two weeks and that fucked me up, I learned my lesson.”

“You don’t learn your lesson, or you wouldn’t be here.”

The momentary humour faded, Ranboo going back to silently staring at the greying horizon.

“Do you think it’ll do anything?” Tommy wasn’t used to that kind of insecurity coming from Lethe’s mask. “Do you think it’ll actually change their minds.”

“I thought I was the one getting cold feet.”

“Well I...” He paused “I’m gonna regret saying this but I trust you.”

“My mum said one time there’s only so many people that can be in on a secret before someone leaks it, by accident or otherwise. There’s been whispers for weeks, and now this, there’ll be people involved tripping over themselves to fess up before it stands against them.” Tommy replied as confidently as he could muster, which wasn’t very. “Right? The moment this comes out people will find more, and they already kind of know it’s real, just a little.”

“I hope it works.”

“I mean they think we’re terrorists.” He said wryly. “They’re just going to think we’re waiting for the right moment, it’s crazy to even try.”

“Is it really that crazy?” Lethe glanced up. “I mean.” He gestured to the small black wing charm hanging off Tommy’s belt. “You got that from the riot didn’t you.”

He nodded, picking at it, running a thumb over the peeling paint on the wood. It had seen a battering with everything it had been through in the weeks since he’d gotten it, he’d have to repaint it some time. “What about it.”

“It doesn’t matter if they believe us, all they need is an excuse. They know how bad it is, we’ve all been living it. The curfews, the increased Enforcer presence, they know it’s coming. The only thing that’s been holding them back is us, fighting the Syndicate is the only thing that made all this stuff legitimate. If they know it wasn’t us, what’s stopping them.”

“You sound very old sometimes.” Tommy said shortly. “I thought I was being reassuring, quit taking my job.” Lethe just shrugged.

“That’s how Phil told it to me.”

Tommy laughed. "Figures the old man would be dramatic."

"We don't need to be the best, we don't need to change anything, we just need to be a bit better than the alternative."

Lethe gestured down at the street, at the Enforcer trucks below. One was driving away, most likely the one carrying the Warden, the rest were being unloaded of riot gear, shields, all the protective equipment they didn't bring the first time.

This time, they had no plans to run, and it showed.

"When I said we needed to hang out more outside of hero work this isn't what I meant." Ranboo mumbled.

"Hey, hey, this isn't a we thing. This is your fault I'm even here." Tommy retorted.

"How do we know anything will even happen? Are we going to be alone?"

"Like I said, covered. Phil made sure of it. Everyone in Manberg will have heard the radio we were listening to with Eryn earlier, plus he contacted several protest groups, sent copies of information to some of the underground radio stations, he's got everything covered."

"They'll be at the gates of the presidential residence, they'll be handing out flyers in the train stations, they'll be angry, they'll want a riot. We won't be alone." Wilbur chimed in over their earpieces, which Tommy had forgotten to switch off.

"So you're...encouraging it?" He asked, bewildered. "You want them to fight?"

"Newspapers can be destroyed, interviews can be taken off the air, the truth can be covered up so normal people don't see a thing. Unless we get out there and we cause problems and we make them look nothing will be done. And this one we want everyone's attention for." Wilbur agreed over their earpieces.

"And if it gets out of hand?"

"Well, we just recruited a bunch of heroes to help us keep it safe. But really, out of hand is out of hand for them, not us. They don't want it to be disruptive because god forbid they can't go on the way they have been."

"And there's...."

"There's no other options. Peaceful protests did nothing, petitions did nothing, democracy is dead and buried with Schlatt's fifteen years as president. We tried disruptive action alone and we were villainised for it." Wilbur said flatly. "We tried everything, and Schlatt just took it and made us look like the bad guys."

"If they wanted peace they could have answered the petitions. Instead, we take the fight to them." Techno said shortly, leaving no room for argument. "On that note, that Purple guy says the news is on."

He didn't even wait to correct Techno, scrambling his phone out of his pocket, opening the news app, holding it up to get a better signal. Ranboo leaned in, squinting at the screen, which was fuzzy, it was barely possible to make out the two presenters.

"And now, the news at 8. Our main story is the breaking news about the recent leak of documents that frame President Schlatt at the centre of a plot to destabilise the very core of our democracy.

"This is playing on those huge screens in the city centre." Lethe told him quietly. "And in every house between here and the border that's tuned into this station right now. And all the other stations we've roped in."

"The documents reveal private dealings between the president and numerous top allies, including fraudulent payments, insider trading, embezzlement of government funds into offshore private bank accounts, even evidence that alleges votes at the last election may have been rigged to reelect president Schlatt, you name it, it's in these files."

"That's right, not only that but the president's own son has attested to the legitimacy of them, and the evidence provided looks damning, with former staff members and leading members of his government coming forward to including the former police commissioner, Ms Walters."

"Mum!" Tommy surged forward, seeing Kristin's face pop up on the screen, a short video that seemed to be taken of her outside a news station, talking to crowds. "What's she doing? Why is she there?"

"She's doing what we're doing. Making sure everyone hears about it." Phil tried to calm him down.

"She didn't tell me." The panic returned, surging up in a wave in his chest.

"She's safe, I have people with her. She knew if she told you you'd try and stop her." Phil said quietly. "But she needs this as much as you do. She's suffered too, she knows things no one else does, and god knows we need every voice we can get."

The screen flickered, and Lethe leaned closer. "Wait what's happening."

"We're having some brief connection issues please stand b..."

The audio cut out. Tommy frowned, stretching his arm up a bit further to try and get the signal back. "It's gone black, I think I lost connection."

"It's not your device." Phil said grimly.

They waited in silence, staring at the screen. "What's happening?" Tommy shook his phone again as if that would help.

"I think they're forcing a broadcast through." Phil reported after a moment. "One of my contacts just messaged me, said they must have a remote connection to the broadcasting house, they've cut off the news videofeed and have sent in one of their own instead."

"Why are they able to do that?" Lethe

“It was installed without their knowledge, probably.”

The signal returned, but this time it was another figure on the screen, standing in the presidential press room.

“We’re interrupting this broadcast to bring you an official presidential statement regarding a Syndicate attack.” A prerecorded voice read out. Schlatt looked alert and angry, a barely concealed steel in the tension of his jaw and the furrow of his brow. As the camera turned to him fully it melted away to a face of calm concern, a terrifying shift.

“We’ve gotten word of an assault on Enforcer units sent to apprehend the Agency head, the so-called Warden in accordance with the information received that he may have assisted in the recent hospital attacks. The Agency responded with violence, refused to hand him over.”

“That’s not true.” Tommy burst out, as if the screen could hear him.

“What, a politician lied. Go figure.” Wilbur said bitterly. “You heard the Enforcer, they planned this. Probably just edited the script.”

“...and it seems that they had Syndicate back up. We have lost contact with the Enforcer unit sent to escort the Warden but as of last communications we understand that several Agency members killed in the fighting, we’ve yet to receive exact numbers but...”

“Nevermind. He didn’t edit the script.” Tommy breathed. “Oh my god, he jumped the gun, we’ve caught him in a lie.” Lethe shushed him, one ear titled towards the phone.

“It’s clear to me now that I have only been delaying the inevitable, in the hopes that these people, these metahumans would regain their humanity.” He shook his head slowly, staring down at the podium as if in deep regret. Tommy felt cold rush down his spine.

“I have given them every chance but enough is enough. They have been a plague, a parasite upon this nation. We gave them homes, medical care, villages, schools, jobs, set up programs to get them into law enforcement, we gave them the Agency, we gave them every chance to prove themselves worthy of a place within this great nation and they have thrown it at our feet and laughed.”

He gripped the stand so hard it seemed as if it would splinter under his fingers.

“I understand that as we speak they are rallying people into their war on us, they are calling all their friends to storm our towns and cities, on the basis of falsified evidence that seeks to destroy the nation we have built. For heavens sake, they have indocrinated my own son, are using him as a mouthpiece for their ideologies. You can’t trust what you see in the media, they have taken control of the media, you can’t trust what you see in the newspapers, they have taken the newspapers, this is one of the most blatant and audacious attacks on our media and our free speech.”

“Smart.” Lethe whispered. “I don’t like it, but it’s a smart move.”

“It’s the only move he has now.”

“In the name of our nation I call upon you the people now. You understand those in your midst better than anyone. Get these intruders out of our homes, our jobs, our lives are on the line, drive them from the streets, make them ashamed to show their faces. Too long have we been afraid of the invisible threat of these so called metahumans, as I said earlier, there is no more time. With fists, with guns, whatever it takes, we must drive them from our city and put an end to this cloud that has been looming over us for years. It is your duty as fellow patriots to make sure that our homes, our schools are safe, and so we can at last carry on with our lives without metahumans and their sympathisers taking everything we hold dear from us. Our city, our nation will prevail over these monsters, I will be deploying our forces to the streets, aid them in any way you can. That is all.”

It shut out.

Tommy felt a hand close around his heart. “He wants us dead. He really does.”

“No time for that.” Lethe pointed to the end of the street just as the screeching of tires reached them, three more trucks full of Enforcers barreling down the road towards the tower.

“They’re here! Back up is here!” Tommy yelled, not caring who heard it. He barely had time to take in what he’d just heard, watching rows of soldiers spill out of their trucks, forming up with those already there into a wall of riot shields, armed with guns and god knows what else.

“They’re going to try and storm the building!”

“We’re ready for them.” Achilles said grimly. “I’d like to see them try.”

“Copy that.” Lethe replied. He switched his earpiece off for a second turning to Tommy. “No time to dwell on things.” He held his arm out. “Ready?”

Tommy grabbed his wrist, pulling himself up onto the wall, checking his mask, his hood, patting his pockets to make sure everything was secure in a last ditch effort to settle his nerves.

“This is it?”

“This is it.” Lethe confirmed. “Are you ready?” He repeated.

Tommy stood still for a moment, letting the wind rush past, drawing in the sounds of the city one last time before nodding. “You and me. Let’s go.”

Icarus took a deep breath and then stepped forward off the edge of the rooftop, tumbling once again into the unknown.

Chapter End Notes

Sorry for the long update time! This chapter turned into a monster so I've decided to split it in two, the next chapter will be between now and mid december, with the last chapter coming up

probably on WHT's two year anniversary, which is insane to say but we're nearly there! We're on the home run now, WHT WILL be finished, I know I was gone for a bit but everything is nearly all written out.

And with that, I hope you enjoyed the chapter! Please remember to tag spoilers if you're talking about it on twitter, both for the sake of people who aren't caught up, and so i can see!



art by the amazing @bluestrasa on twitter



art by @niimiro on twitter, here's the [original tweet](#)

!



art by @niimiro on twitter, here's the [original tweet](#)

!



art by @652Phantom on twitter, here's the [original tweet](#)

!



art by the beloved @gremnda on twitter, here's the [original tweet](#)!

It's a revolution I suppose

Chapter Notes

Title from Radioactive by imagine dragons

This chapter has been split because it was getting close to 14k words so second chapter later today/tomorrow

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

The wind whistled past his ears as he fell, watching the ground rush up towards him. He slowed himself at the last moment, landing on his feet, dropping back into a defensive position.

The line of Enforcers backed away, an almost comical sight with a handful of metas facing down maybe thirty or more Enforcers, but still the Enforcers clearly had the lower hand. There was a silent standoff for a few moments, the Enforcer's attention fixed on Orpheus and Achilles who were in the lead, apparently tagging them as the main threats, with the rest of the Syndicate and some of the Agency fanning out behind them.

"Nemesis?" Orpheus said softly, having noticed this too. "Would you do the honours?"
"My pleasure." Niki stepped forward, reaching out her arms. Water began to rise around her, condensing out of the air, rising from the grates in the road, out of the windows, the doors, she was draining every pipe in the area, gathering it around her in a towering waterspout, leaving her barely visible behind it.

A cry broke from her throat and she threw her hands forward. A tidal wave washed past, slamming into the wall of Enforcers, lifting them clean off their feet. Some of them dropped their shields, their guns, desperately trying to stay afloat as she flicked her wrist, sending them flying. They were swept away down the street, screaming and flailing.

"Leave some for the rest of us." Techno muttered into his earpiece, but they could hear the grin in his voice as he watched them go.

A few more had staggered to their feet, regaining their gear, trying to restore some semblance of order. Eryn darted forward before anyone could do anything, sending a fireball straight towards one of the trucks. The flames rushed around the protective shielding, digging into towards the engine.

It burst into flames, roaring out on either side, sending the remaining Enforcers scattering. Techno stepped towards it completely fearless, the gas mask he wore offering safety from the smoke, reaching his arms out. The flames rippled away, sinking into his skin without leaving a scratch, the heat dying out.

"Don't get cocky, we don't want casualties." He warned the younger boy.

"Sorry." Eryn muttered, not sorry in the slightest, already readying another fireball in his fingers. Purpled was nowhere to be seen, but that meant nothing, he could be anywhere, invisible in plain sight.

“Take Blaze and get uptown, that’s where the noise is.” Orpheus told Puffy, taking charge now that Phil was gone. “That’s where they’ll need you, focus on keeping civilians safe. We’ll handle it from here.”

She didn’t look like she needed to be asked again, a little pale at the destruction around her but holding it together. She took advantage of an opening in the chaos, vanishing into the crowd that was gathering to watch.

More Enforcers were starting to spill in, evidently word of a full scale Syndicate attack had spread fast, trying to close off both ends of the road but it was futile. Eryn was smashing aside the barricades as they built them, looking like he was having more than a little fun with his newfound freedom, flames roaring up the boys arms.

He was almost single-handedly carving a way through the streets, driving them forward, down the streets towards the the centre of the city, the Enforcers keeping a wary distance from the inferno blazing around him. Tommy could barely keep up, hovering to the back, keeping an eye out for anyone getting too close to civilians, his Agency training kicking in and finally useful for once.

Every now and then an Enforcer crumpled, an invisible force striking them across the head, taking their legs out from under them. Here and there, Purpled shimmered in and out of the view, just barely visible for a moment, and only if you knew where you were looking.

Tommy slammed his elbow into an Enforcers head, tearing their helmet clean off, slamming his fist into the man’s jaw. Something crunched, his opponent stumbling away clutching his cheek. He didn’t feel an ounce of pity somehow.

In the chaos no one had noticed one of the Enforcers running towards a car at the top of the street, shoving the driver out. He’d taken the brakes off and let it roll down the hill, gathering speed fast, both Enforcers and onlookers flinging themselves out of the way.

The screams were all that alerted him to the oncoming threat. Tommy spun around, his eyes widening as it shot towards him, faster and faster. There was too little time to dodge, he threw himself to the ground in hopes it would go over his head.

It stopped short, the tires screeching to a halt. He pushed himself up, looking around. His hands were a little grazed but his gloves had saved him from the worst of it.

A shadow had fallen over him. He looked up slowly to see Achilles standing over him, one hand outstretched. The car had slammed into his fist, stopping dead, not leaving a mark on either of them.

He stood up slowly, blinking a little. Achilles laughed, a low, cold laugh. He placed a hand on Tommy’s shoulder, squeezing it.

“Stay close to me if you’re going to do that kind of thing.” Tommy stared up at him not with fear but with a kind of admiration, a grin breaking.

“That was cool as hell.”

“I know.” Techno dusted his hands off like it was nothing.

“Oh fuck you.” Tommy punched the chassis of the car, his arm glowing as he did so. The truck went flying, flipping over and over, slamming into the second story floor of an abandoned house on the other side of the street.

A little destructive perhaps but it got the message across, the Enforcers below scattered, screaming in terror. He guided it down, making sure it didn't actually hit anyone, straining under the weight a little before glancing back at Techno for approval. Achilles gave him a little nod, eyes tightening in a smile hidden under his mask before turning away.

Out of the corner of his eye he saw his brother shake his hand out, like he'd hurt it when he smacked the car, looking a little annoyed with himself. Nothing serious, but he'd clearly played it off.

His smile was wiped moments later, thrown back into reality moments later with the sound of crashing glass. He grabbed Lethe's arm, yanking him around just in time to see another brick fly from a man's hand, soaring through the doors of the police precinct at the end of the street, scattering glass across the pavement.

A thrill ran down his spine. Whether it was fear or excitement he didn't know, but he couldn't take his eyes off it. Everything was suddenly happening at once, people were rushing towards them, a few police officers flooded out of the station, trying to keep them at bay but it was useless, the Enforcers were scattered and struggling to keep in control, swamped by more people than they knew how to handle.

"That was, easier than I thought it would be." Niki said slowly, carefully, as if afraid to jinx it. "Where's the rest."

"They'll send more." Achilles replied, looking grim. "This was probably just what they had nearby. We need to move, fast."

"Where to?"

"Towards the city centre. Bring this lot with us." He motioned around him. Bystanders were starting to get emboldened by the lack of Enforcer presence, or angered by the theft of the car and the carelessness for the lives that had been endangered in a desperate attempt to get the Syndicate were moving to join, either out of agreement or out of plain rebellion he wasn't sure but either way, it was working.

He was suddenly enveloped into a blur of moving bodies and screaming, it might have crushed him if it weren't for the almost reverent way the crowd eyed him with, a mix of fear, respect and anger, keeping a wary distance but still carrying him along down the street.

"Where are we going!" He called out to Lethe.

"That way I think."

Someone was running towards the police station again holding something. It was Eryn, carrying the gas cannister he'd stolen from the Agency kitchen. He held it over his head, hollering for people to get out of the way, a gleeful smile splashed across his face.

"Lethe!" Lethe turned slowly on his heel, the movement oddly menacing. The blank mask scanned the crowd, looking for him. "Lethe! Get down!"

He tackled Ranboo by the knees, slamming him into the ground, clapping his hands over his head as a thunderclap echoed over the street, the cannister erupting in flames, consuming the front of the station in fire.

As soon as it dissipated Lethe scrambled to his feet, looking around urgently. "Eryn!"

Tommy's heart stuck in his throat. The silence held for one, two, three beats, and then a shape stirred in the depths of the flames. Eryn emerged from the fire, shaking the ashes out of his hair, grinning from ear to ear and completely unharmed.

He gave Tommy a cocky thumbs up, strolling down the stairs like it was a normal day. "Hey! Whatcha think of that." They both stared at him, reeling.

"Have you lost your fucking mind!" Tommy yelled. "What is wrong with you." But it wasn't all mad, there was a bit of admiration in there too.

"You could have killed people." Lethe managed at last.

"I've got it under control." Eryn stuck his hands in his pockets, grinning. "Besides, you burned down a bookshop and chucked a car into a house, this makes us even right?"

"I think we might have made a mistake bringing this guy on." Ranboo muttered, only half joking. Eryn just took it in stride.

"You wanted them to pay attention right?" He asked, though it wasn't really a question. "Well they're paying attention now."

"Yes but..."

"I'm not destroying a single house." He said happily. "Or shop, just government property. They can pay for it." He looked at their faces. "Are we doing this or not? Like do you want a thing or are we just yelling really loud." Eryn asked, just as stubborn as ever. 'Cause if I remember right the yelling didn't do shit, and you're the ones who came in telling us we needed to do something to make a different."

"Just be careful. You could get hurt." Tommy conceded.

"They tried to kill me twenty minutes ago, I really don't care man."

Before Tommy could say anything else he was swept away, the crowd flooding up towards Eryn. The boy was hoisted up onto their shoulders, beaming, waving at Tommy as he was carried away to the sound of cheers.

"We've created a monster." Tommy breathed, watching as he left. Lethe could only nod in agreement.

"Very glad he's on our side."

Whatever they'd started, it was rapidly spiralling out of control, they'd underestimated how quickly the city's anger was spilling over. People were already on the streets, faces covered with masks or scarves, clearly heading to whatever protest was up town and deciding to join this one instead as soon as they realised the Syndicate wasn't paying them any mind.

If anything, the presence of the white masks emboldened them, some growing more and more confident as they realised the wary berth any peace keeping forces were leaving around them. Orpheus wasn't doing anything at all, just striding confidently down the street at the head of the crowd with Achilles at his shoulder. They didn't have to move or attack or anything, their presence leaving ripples, like two ghosts appearing in broad daylight.

He didn't know where they were going but he was being lifted up almost by the rush, driven onwards to whatever end. He could hear a drumbeat somewhere, he didn't know if it was his heart pounding or someone down the street but it drove him on, his footsteps falling into rhythm as the momentum carried him onwards.

It bottlenecked at the main bridge across the river. All traffic on it had been halted, barricades blocking the other ends. The growing crowd rushed towards it, the sound of explosions in the distance heralding Eryn's path. They spilled around the stopped cars, some people clambering over them in an endless tide.

Tommy found himself by the edge, back against the metal railings along the bridge, fighting an Enforcer with a baton, wrestling him towards the edge in an attempt to throw him towards the river below. He managed to fight him off and the Enforcer was dragged away into the crowd, swallowed completely by it as it heaved and swelled.

A hand grabbed his shoulder in a vice-like grip. He spun around instinctively, fist flying towards his assailant's face.

"Hey!" Metal fingers caught his, stopping it dead in place, painfully tight. "It's me!" Android stared back at him, eyes wide. "It's me."

"Android?" Tommy breathed. "What the hell."

"I'm not your enemy." He let go of Tommy's fist, stumbling back, strangely out of breath. "I'm not."

Niki's head snapped around down the street having heard the exchange over her earpiece. She slammed her elbow into the chest of the Enforcer she was fighting, sending him reeling before tossing him to the floor, running up the street towards them.

"Jack? What are you doing here?" She looked wary, moving towards Tommy as if to shield

"Yeah I thought you weren't getting involved." Tommy added.

The cyborg waved his hand. "No time for that. Who do I talk to, who's your boss."

Niki and Tommy shared looks. "We don't really work like that. Tell us." The cyborg didn't look too comfortable about that but he didn't look like he had time to argue either.

"I was listening to Enforcer radio, they're planning a strike on the Syndicate."

"To be expected, really." Niki said sarcastically. "I don't know what else they were planning after all this."

"How the hell did you get into Enforcer channels, they're crazy secure and-. Oh." Ranboo cut himself off. "Forgot."

"Having a computer for a brain comes in handy." Jack tossed over his shoulder, clearly trying to hide more than a little unease at the sight of Lethe, eyes lingering on him for a few moments as if waiting for him to do something. "But I need to ask, what is Haven?"

“What did you say?” Niki’s eyes went all wide. A cold chill ran down Tommy’s spine. “What did you say!” She grabbed his shoulders, forcing him to face her. “Jack. Look at me. What did you hear.”

“Whatever it is, they know where it is. They’ve been gathering since this morning ready to strike it, long before you came to us. Whatever Schlatt has planned it’s serious, they’re calling in nearly a hundred Enforcers, armoured vehicles, everything. That’s why there’s not many here.”

The words spilled out of him in a rush, he looked a little scared even. Tommy couldn’t blame him, Niki’s grip was iron and she was staring him down with a fierce intensity he’d almost never seen from her before.

“What. Why? How?” She cut him off.

“I don’t know. Look, I don’t like the Syndicate, I don’t like how you’re doing this, but broadcasting the destruction of that base could be a major blow to whatever cause you’re trying to do.” He paused, grimacing a little. “Can you let go of me now. I can’t breathe.”

She looked a little guilty, backing away, eyes wide. “Oh my god. They can’t. They can’t do that.”

Android looked between them, a little confused. “What is it? Am I missing something.”

“Jack it’s not a base. It’s a safe house.” Niki whispered. “They’re going to broadcast the death of innocent people.”

His eyes flickered, as if re-evaluating the people in front of him slowly with this new information. “A safe house?”

“What, did you really think I’d allied myself with monsters, is that really all you thought of me.” Niki shot back, a small piece of her temper rising before she stamped it down, shaking her head. “I’m sorry, uncalled for. Yes, it’s a safe house, its where the Syndicate disappearances end up. That’s where I was, they saved me, they saved them.”

“You can’t tell him that!” Lethe protested.

“There’s nothing to lose.” Niki said grimly. “If they know where it is it’s too late.”

“This could be a trap.” Tommy moved back a little, folding his arms. “You can’t trust him.”

“Believe me, I don’t want to be here either.” Jack replied, a small flicker of humour surfacing for a moment in a tight smile. “You’re my last resort.”

“We could lead him right to it.” Tommy argued. “Isn’t that just so much worse.”

“Nemesis?” Lethe asked. “What do we do.”

“Either way, Haven is in danger and we need to get them out.” Niki said carefully. She reached out, taking Jack’s hand and squeezing it. “Thank you. You didn’t have to come back.”

Jack just shrugged awkwardly. "I don't know, seemed like the right thing to do. Don't make me regret it."

She tapped her earpiece. "Orpheus, Achilles, Persephone, Haven has been discovered, we need to evacuate now."

"WHAT!" Sniff's voice came in loud and clear over the radio. "When. What happened?"

"Someone warned us, no time to explain. We need to move."

"Can we trust them?" Sniff asked. "Are you sure?" Niki turned to Jack, looking him up and down. His expression was pleading, begging them to believe him.

"He's an old friend, I trust him." She said at last. "And we can't take the risk."

"Thank you." Jack whispered. No sooner had he finished than a blaring siren cut across their earpieces, shrill and piercing. Tommy winced, turning his earpiece off quickly, seeing Lethe and Niki do the same.

"That's the alarm, it gets everyone into the escape tunnels," Lethe explained. "We've run drills before."

"Do they know where to go?"

"Aimsey will lead, they know every nook and cranny of that place." Niki tried to reassure him.

"Will that be enough?" Tommy asked nervously. "Do they have enough time?"

"Probably not." Achilles drew alongside them, expression steely over his mask. "Go. If me and Orpheus leave they'll follow us, but you might have a chance. Take Lethe and go." He motioned at Niki. "You especially. I know what this means to you."

She gave him a grateful look, motioning to Lethe to hurry up. "Come on."

"What's the rush?" Android asked, confused. "If they're evacuating do you really want to draw more attention to it?"

"There's children in there." Achilles said. Even through the gas mask they could hear the barely veiled anger. Something seemed to set, Android's posture shifting. He sized Achilles up, looking him up and down, and Techno met his gaze just as steadily, honest and true. Whatever lie the cyborg was looking for in his expression he didn't find it.

"The enemy of my enemy is my friend." Jack said grimly. "If you're telling the truth I'll help you, just this once. Tell me where to go."

“You’ll need everyone you can get.” Achilles told Nemesis before she even had to ask if that was okay. “If you trust him, I trust you.”

“Spark.” Tommy turned, running towards Eryn. “Spark! They’re raiding a big safe house behind our backs, we have to go.”

Eryn took this in for a second and then nodded. “Don’t have to tell me twice boss. You want a distraction?”

“A distraction would be great.” Orpheus strolled over, a slight grin cracking under his mask. “What do you have in mind.”

“Oh I have ideas.” Eryn’s face lit up, and by the looks of things that wasn’t going to be the last things lighting up today, the boy eyeing gas canisters tucked inside a nearby street behind some bins.

“I want it on record that this is a terrible idea.” Tommy mumbled but it was already too late. Eryn was running, flames streaming from his hands as he leapt into the air, a ball of fire gathering in his arms, hurtling towards the blockade.

An armoured truck was thrown high into the air, exploding into shards of shrapnel and glass that rained down on the Enforcers, a fireball consuming the fuel tank. But he was only just getting started. The explosion sent cracks across the pavement. The tarmac ruptured, exposing a gas pipeline buried under it as it burst open, flames roaring up to engulf it.

“We’ll hold the line.” Orpheus motioned for them to leave. “You need to make it to Haven, you need to get them out, Lethe is the only one that can.”

No one was looking at them, all eyes on the wall of fire racing up the street. Niki grabbed Tommy’s arm, tugging him forward.

“He’s got it handled! We have to go. They’re not counting on us having advance warning, and they may not be counting on Lethe, we can’t waste time.”

Lethe grabbed onto their hands. “Where do I go?”

“Outside, we don’t know what we’re heading into!” Niki yelled over the noise around them.

Lethe didn’t hesitate. They landed on the track leading up to the warehouse that covered Haven’s entrance, Tommy hitting the ground running, sprinting towards the gate. He skidded to a sudden halt, throwing his arms out to slow the people behind him.

“Watch out!”

A line of Enforcers awaited them on the concrete, heavily armed, backs to the entrance of the building. Niki swore quietly, moving to the front. “They were expecting us.”

“They were expecting someone.” Jack corrected. “Probably Achilles. Hopefully they’re unprepared.”

There was silence for a few moments while Tommy tried to put together a plan, the sound of the wind whistling through the empty lot, the weeds that had forced their way through the concrete around them swaying gently. Almost beautiful in a way, as he stared down the barrel of the guns aimed right at him.

Then the stillness was torn apart by rattling gunfire. He screamed, throwing his hands over his head in panic but the impact never came. The bullets hovered still in the air between them, Tommy holding them at bay without even trying.

They kept shooting, out of panic or stubbornness he didn't know, Something in him snapped, and he saw red. The bullets turned, pointing towards the Enforcers, a haze across his eyes. They began to move, faster and faster, heading straight for his enemy.

"Tommy!" Niki grabbed his jaw, pulling him around to look at her. His concentration faltered, the bullets clattered to the ground, his concentration lost. He stopped short, breathing hard. "What the hell are you doing."

"I nearly-."

"I know." She switched from anger so quickly, holding his arm to steady him. "I know."

"I could have killed them." The panic rose again, along with the feeling he was horribly out of his depth.

"But you didn't. If the roles were reversed, they wouldn't have even hesitated. They didn't hesitate." Tommy was staring at his palms, shaking. Niki reached over, taking his hands gently and curling his fingers shut. "You still have a lot to learn. It's a gift and a curse. Never forget that."

Some of the Enforcers had already scattered and run. No doubt coming up against someone who could fight back had shattered their confidence, and the blank of Lethe and the fear of the Syndicate was probably helping. Nemesis dispatched of those stupid enough not to follow, motioning for them to follow her.

He stayed rooted in place, trying to catch his breath. Android slowed as he passed, an expression close to pity on his face. Tommy was too shaken to even complain about it.

"What?" He managed at last.

"If it's between you or them, make sure it's them." Jack said shortly. He paused, as if he was going to say something else but decided against it. "Get it together. There'll be more of that soon."

It wasn't meant cruelly, and it finally jolted Tommy back to his senses, the urgency rushing back in. Niki dispatched of the last few Enforcers swiftly and silently, stepping over their unconscious bodies with a cool indifference. She appraised the doors for a moment listening.

"There's more inside, a lot more. Lethe take us down, we won't make it past them."

He didn't even have time to blink, his stomach lurching as they dropped through the stone, reappearing in the centre of Haven.

The sirens were louder than ever hear, wailing in his ears, the peaceful sanctuary he'd known thrown into chaos. People were running back and forth, trying to gather up little pieces to carry with them, Sniff trying to make some order out of it.

Jack was in shock, staring around in much the same way as Tommy imagined he once had, mouth hanging slightly open. It was a lot to process all at once, but he got no time to breathe, Sniff spotting them through the mayhem, shoulders sinking in relief.

"You're here! Thank god." They shot a curious look at Jack.

"He's with us." Niki explained quickly. "What's the situation?"

"They haven't found the entrance yet but it won't be long." She gathered her shawl around herself, looking frantic. "It's early, so many people were asleep, I need help getting them out."

"Why didn't we get any warning?" Lethe asked. "We're supposed to have cameras, sensors, everything for this kind of thing."

Sniff looked so guilty, running a hand over tired eyes. "It was stupid. I'm so sorry, I let my guard down, I've been so stressed with everything happening, I haven't been getting much sleep, I was distracted watching everything going on on the surface and they crept up on me..."

Niki stopped them, shaking her head. "You're fine, you did nothing wrong. It happens. We'll worry about it later. What do we do?"

Sniff pointed at a grate at the far end of one of the tunnels large enough to formed a makeshift street, dwellings carved into the walls. "Send everyone down there, there's an escape route to the river, I can take it from there."

There was a deep grinding sound from behind them, stone against stone, screeching. Tommy spun around to see two vast stone gates he hadn't noticed before begin to close, moving to cover the main entrance tunnel.

"Flood gates. They've been disused for years, they're supposed to control the water flow through here back when this was used as a reservoir." Sniff explained quickly. "They'll buy us some time."

Aimsey stood in front of them, dwarfed below the towering stone, their eyes glowing white as they dragged the gates closed. The mechanism was long rusted but it didn't matter, the young meta driving them shut with a loud booming noise as they crashed into the walls.

"No time to stare." Niki tapped his shoulder, dragging his gaze away. "Move."

People were stumbling out dragging on coats and jumpers as they went, the siren still wailing, drilling into his head. A few were trying to pick up food or little keepsakes, clutching onto a fragment of what they'd built down here with a simple desperation.

Sniff ran past, plants growing in their wake, wrapping over buildings, sealing closed doors and windows in an effort to slow the Enforcers progress, a few others helping her however they could. He watched as a snake of ice dragged down the banners draped over the walls, hiding anything that possibly could give away the identities of those within.

Tommy began to search through the buildings, calling out for anyone else. He could hear Niki doing the same across the way. The tiny houses were filled with photo frames, hand sewn clothes, little pieces of humanity that they'd had to leave behind.

He almost wanted to take some of it with him, to try and protect it but there was no way, and no time, he just had to brush past them. He searched through the last few rooms, guiding a parrot hybrid out, pointing them towards a metal grate at the far end of one of the makeshift streets that had been lifted, Lethe herding people through.

"How did they even find this?" Tommy drew level with Niki who was herding a young couple towards the escape. She turned, looking grim.

"I'm afraid it was probably Tubbo, they would have put all resources into finding him, they probably had cameras on him all the way here."

Tommy went pale. "Did I..."

"No, you did the right thing. We can't account for everything."

"And if it wasn't?" Tommy whispered. "If they worked it out themselves, without him?"

"Then they know who we are, and where we live, and where we've been." Phil replied over his earpiece. "It's bad."

"Don't worry about that for now, we knew it might happen." Niki brushed it aside. "Come on. We have work to do."

As if on cue, a concussive explosion rocked the ground. Tommy cried out, covering his ears as the ceiling shook, dust scattering from it. There was a moment of silence, the inhabitants staring up, stunned in shock.

Then panic broke out, people screaming and running in all directions. Tommy spun around, head twisting from side to side trying to see what was happening. "What was that!"

"They're trying to break open the flood gates." Jack's mechanical eye was scanning the far wall.

"They have explosives."

Sniff's eyes went wide with horror. "You're joking. They would have brought us hours."

"Deal with it as it comes." Phil ordered across the earpieces, clearly listening in. "Continue with the plan. Get everyone into the tunnels, and then collapse them behind you."

Another explosion echoed and Tommy felt his heart drop.

“Snap out of it.” Niki clicked her fingers in front of his face. “We need to move.” He jolted forward, running back inside, finding himself in the food store he’d seen in one of his first visits weeks ago.

The cans had fallen off the shelves, shaken by the explosion, glass shattered across the floor. All the hard work, the neat ledger on the desk with the numbers, the brightly painted walls in an attempt to bring some life to this sunless place, all of it was being torn apart.

He lingered for a few moments, strangely moved by the simple sight of it, the destruction of the lives that had been lived here in a matter of moments. The siren wailed outside seemed distant, time seeming to stop, just for a moment.

“Icarus! Hurry up!”

“All clear!” He stepped outside. “No one in here. Anywhere else?”

“Just.” Niki turned up the tunnel, towards the last area they hadn’t cleared.

Her cafe, the little hollow carved into the rock, all of her hopes and dreams encapsulated in that tiny cramped building. She stepped inside the kitchen, looking around slowly, trying to take it all in. She bit her lip, tears welling up in the corner of her eyes.

“We need to go.” Sniff joined them, pushing her hair out of her eyes.

“Give me a minute.” Niki took one last look, savouring the memory for as long as she could, eyes gliding over every detail of it like it was the most beautiful thing she’d ever seen, this cramped kitchen buried under the earth, and the tiny room beyond barely big enough to fit a bed.

She turned at last, shutting the door gently behind her, nodding to Sniff.

“Close it.” It wasn’t much more than a whisper. The deer hybrid reached out, placing a hand on her shoulder, squeezing it gently in a silent show of support.

“Close it.” Niki said louder. “I’m done here.” She turned away, as if she couldn’t bear to look as Sniff raised their arms. A thorny vine forced its way up through the earth, wrapping around the door, looping under the handle and pulling it shut.

It stole over the windows, the door, digging into every nook and cranny to secure itself, the branches thickening, growing leaves and thorns to further obscure it. Small buds appeared along its length, blossoming into sweet pink roses, sealing the bakery completely, the thorns growing and growing until they were half the length of his thumb.

“That’ll make it hell for them to get in.” Sniff said, dusting her hands off, sharing a small smile with Niki. “If they want it, they can suffer for it.”

“Thank you.”

They were jolted back into reality moments later by another explosion, more dust shaking from the ceiling. Cracks were starting to show in the door, Aimsey battling to close them as they opened.

“We gotta go!” Tommy sprinted towards the grate.

“Aimsey come on!” Snifferish called out. “Leave it.” Aimsey dropped his hands without question and jogged over to the escape tunnel.

Sniff stopped, lingering for a moment in the middle of the grass, grass that shouldn’t exist so far down, by the little tree sapling she’d grown once. Life had flourished in this place against all odds, and now it was crumbling. He could see Sniff’s lip curl, in anger or disgust or both, fists white knuckled, staring at the door.

“Persephone?” Ranboo prompted. “We gotta go.”

“If I ever see the fucker who did this they’re going to burn.” Sniff said softly. “They’ll regret they ever crossed me.”

Her gaze lingered on the doors for one more vengeful second, before she took a deep breath, collecting herself, the anger hardening into steel. She dusted herself off, turning and striding towards the tunnels, composed.

A rumbling began behind them. He turned to see the floor rising up, bricks twisting towards the roof, sealing the way shut, Aimsey guiding it closed.

“We’re in the tunnels.” Sniff reported to Phil. “Haven is empty.” He could see the strength it took to say that, some kind of anger and grief lacing the deer hybrids voice.

“Well done. But we can’t celebrate yet, get them to the boats.” Phil told them. “Stay safe.” His voice was getting fainter, more crackly as they headed deeper in.

“Are you alright?” Ranboo asked Niki softly. She was straggling behind a bit, taking a moment to compose herself. She took a deep breath, painting a brave smile on her face.

“I’ve built my life back from the ground up once, I can do it again.”

Another dull boom rang out, rattling the tunnel roof, sending cracks through it. “Keep moving!” Sniff called over their heads.

“Is e-. thing. Right-.” Their earpieces crackled, buzzing.

“Phil? You’re breaking up?” There was no reply.

“We’re going too deep underground. We had a transmitter in Haven but we’re heading out of range of that now. We’re on our own.” Sniff said grimly. “I’ll take the lead, Aimsey’s scouting ahead, you make sure no one falls behind.” She ordered, striding away.

“What are they thinking of. They’re risking the whole city, these tunnels collapsing could damage everything.” Lethe was rambling in his ear, mostly likely out of stress, wringing his hands nervously. “If they weaken this they could damage miles of old tunnels, that could cause chaos, buildings would collapse-.”

“I don’t think they care.” Tommy cut in.

They had to crawl at points, the drain narrowing. It was almost claustrophobic but he pushed it aside, placing his trust in Snifferish to guide them through. The only light down here was an assortment of flashlights and lanterns people were carrying, carried in a single file procession.

He could hear a child crying up ahead, whispered conversations here and there but for the most part it was a tense silence, most of Haven's people a little shell-shocked, wrapped in the blankets they managed to grab as they ran.

The tunnel was slowly shifting from concrete to old bricks, the air becoming mustier, the mortar crumbling.

"I need help!" Aimsey's voice echoed down from ahead. "The tunnels really weak here."

"On it." Tommy slipped past, reaching his hands out to help, red light snaking across the cracks in the roof. "I'll take it." He told them. They didn't wait to be told twice, darting back down to help stragglers catch up.

Ranboo slowed down as he headed past, looking up at the roof and back down to him again, shaking his head. "I think I've been here before."

"Either someone gets shot or something explodes." Tommy said wryly. "Always the same with you people."

"Hey! It's not exactly my fault." He protested.

"It was your fault, you're the one who placed the bomb the first time!" Lethe slowed and Tommy could almost see the guilty expression behind his mask, the other boys head tilting slightly.

"Oops?"

He vanished again, taking the light with him, plunging Tommy into relative darkness. Sniff ducked back through, flashlight in hand, looking around anxiously. "How many more?"

He shrugged. "I'm sorry, I lost count." Sniff paled.

"I'm only counting thirty. We're missing two."

"They won't come. They don't want to leave." Aimsey back ran in again, waving his arms. "Someone help me!"

Tommy dropped everything, Lethe running after him, the ceiling holding. They dived into the tunnels once again, their vision obscured by the falling dust and debris as they picked their way over rubble.

“Over here!” She waved him over to the side of a tunnel. Two children were huddled in the corner, the elder a boy with blonde hair and dark feathers behind his ears was trying to pull along a dark haired girl but she didn’t want to leave, trying to go back towards Haven.

The girl was shivering, in her pyjamas and a little red beanie, one arm wrapped around a cat and the other with a white knuckled grip on a wooden flute, seemingly all she could salvage from the coming wreckage.

“Come on.” Tommy knelt in front of them. “Pass her to me.” The older child shook his head firmly. “We don’t have time.”

“What’s taking you so long.” Lethe ran in, skidding to a halt and looking at the scene in front of him, the boy turning to shield the girl behind him. “Oh. Chayanne he’s a friend, come on, we have to go.” He scooped the boy up before Chayanne had any time to protest. “Icarus take Tallulah!”

Tommy didn’t hesitate, picking her up and wrapping his arms around her, clutching her to his chest.

He sprinted back down the tunnels, acutely aware of the tiny shape in his arms, her head pressed against his shoulder, shaking. She clung onto him, the cat cradled in her other arm, both their heartbeats pounding against his as he ran, his breath coming heavy in the stale air.

Sniff waved them past up a flight of narrow steps, the bricks low over their heads but she was smiling. “Nearly there.” She encouraged him. “You’re doing amazing.”

He could smell fresh air, daylight spilling in ahead as he approached a small grate. He lifted Tallulah up, hands grabbing her and pulling her out, before pulling himself up after her, clambering out and emerging onto a small marina by the river, holding an assortment of boats from fishing to leisure, totally indistinguishable from every other small marina that ran along the length of the river.

He had no idea where they were, but the air was clear and no longer heavy with damp and the explosions had faded, and that was all he cared about. He set his precious charge down slowly and she clung to his hand. The cat crept up onto her shoulders, wrapping around her like a scarf, exceptionally calm for the madness going on around them which helped calm her.

“You alright kid?” Tommy asked awkwardly as her breathing steadied. She nodded, searching for the other child.

Chayanne broke away from Lethe, running over, glaring at her more out of relief than actual anger by how hard he held onto her hand. He turned to go, tugging her after but stopped halfway, giving Tommy a wordless nod, some kind of thanks.

“Chayanne!” Sniff strode over. “Where’s your sister,” The girl behind him crept out a bit. “Okay, get to the boats both of you, hurry. The three boats at the front, they’re ours.”

It was a mismatched group, a small dinghy, a sailing boat and a slightly larger yacht, with the name of Phil’s company emblazoned on the side, anchored along a floating walkway close by. It barely looked

like enough space to hold everyone but anything larger would have drawn attention.

“Oh that’s where Goose got to.” Lethe joined him, smiling slightly. “I was wondering.”

The cat on Tallulah’s shoulders was covered with dirt from the roof, hiding her white fur but it definitely was Goose now that Tommy had time to look. He stared for a few moments.

“You just let her have...”

“Well no, Goose just kinda wandered the place. I guess Tallulah took a liking to her.”

“But what if Eret comes...” Lethe gave him a pitying look. Tommy pressed his lips together. “You’re right. She’ll be safe with her.” He conceded at last. His shoulders fell, letting himself catch his breath for a minute.

The stillness felt deafening after the wail of the sirens and the panicked run through the tunnels. He watched silently as Sniff organised final checks of the boats, scanning the dockside for any sign of trouble.

“Where are they going?” He asked at last.

“Scatter to safehouses hopefully. Normally we do it one by one to stop drawing any attention but we don’t really have a choice. Hopefully they’re too focused on the riots to care.”

“And if they aren’t, there’s nothing stopping Sniff kicking their asses any more.” Tommy added, drawing a few smiles from the group, but everyone was too exhausted to say much.

“We did it.” Lethe spoke the words into the silence as Jack limped out of the tunnels. The cyborg managed a weak grin, before collapsing against the wall, sinking down to catch his breath. He watched as Haven’s residents filed onto the boats, brow slightly furrowed, his expression unreadable.

“What is it?” Tommy prompted

“None of your business.” Jack replied automatically.

“I mean, it kinda is.” Ranboo flopped down against the wall. “By definition.”

“I am not used to hearing your voice out of that, that creepy thing.” Jack waved his hand at Lethe’s mask. Lethe shrugged, slipping it off.

“This better?” He ran his hand through his hair slowly, shaking it out. Jack stared at him, but he just shrugged. “I couldn’t breathe under that thing.”

Jack stared for a few more moments before shrugging in a defeated manner.

“Yeah who cares at this point. Nothing makes fuckin’ sense anymore why the hell not.” He muttered. He took a few more deep breaths, staring at his hands, flexing his fingers slowly. “There really were

kids down there.” He said at long last. “You weren’t lying. Not that I thought you were but...”
“You needed to see it. I get it.” Niki finished for him.

“And they trusted you, they looked at you like you were... I don’t know, good.” He aimed this at Lethe.

“We told you. It wasn’t us, it was never us.” Niki pressed her hands to her brow, covering her eyes. She hunched over, letting the tension fall from her shoulders, finally letting herself relax a little. “We were never the bad guys.”

He absorbed that slowly. It was strange to see him so rattled, usually he was the voice of reason but now he just looked a bit shaken.

“I owe you.” Niki said at last.

“You don’t owe me anything.” He said awkwardly. “It’s my job. Or, well, it was before you burned the place down.” He saw Tommy open his mouth. “Metaphorically.”

“Man I thought Eryn would have sorted that by now.” Tommy quipped, a slight grin spreading.

Jack just pressed his lips together, and then got to his feet. He seemed to have made some kind of a decision, a sense of purpose in his step. “I’ll go with them. Keep a watch.”

“You’ll guard them?” Niki asked, surprised.

“I didn’t say that. But...I’ll keep an eye on them.” He conceded at last. “It’s the right thing to do. I’ll see you around.” And with that he drew his hood up to hide his face and marched off without anything more, shadowing the boats from the riverside, following them along from a distance. They watched him go, a little stunned.

“I think you impressed him.” Niki said into the silence.

“Impressed him? He looks like he’s about to kill somebody.”

“Not so different from normal.” She quipped, managing to draw a faint smile from the boy. She reached over, ruffling Tommy’s hair. “I’m proud of you. But celebrations will have to wait. They need us back as soon as we can.”

“Shit.” Tommy tapped his earpiece. “Hello? Is signal back.”

“Hello?” Niki did the same, covering her ear with her hand so she could hear better. “Achilles? Thanatos? Anyone?”

“Oh my god. You’re just in time.” There was visceral relief in Techno’s voice. Tommy felt like his legs were about to fold under him with the strength of that relief, a profound sense of guilt washing over him even though it wasn’t his fault. “We were about to send a search party in.”

“We’re here, we’re okay.” Niki replied. “Dust and debris was messing with the radios but everyone is okay.”

“Alright, rendezvous at Safehouse eleven, Lethe knows where it is.” He told them. “We need to gather up and plan what’s next.”

“Sounds good.” Lethe sat up straight, reenergised at the prospect of a direction. “Ready?”

“Already?” Tommy blinked. “Can we just have a few more minutes.”

“We can rest at the safehouse. Come on.” He let himself be pulled along, barely blinking as they teleported. It was as easy to him as walking now, he had no idea when it had gotten so simple.

Abrupt flashbacks to his first teleporting attempt months ago ending with retching emptily in a bush flashed past his eyes for a moment, drawing a wry smile as they reappeared in an empty house. The walls were bare, no furniture or anything. It was cramped, a For Sale sign just barely visible out of one of the boarded up windows.

He had no idea where they were, nor did he really care. It was quiet, he could catch his breath for a moment and that was all that mattered right now.

Phil emerged from one of the rooms. It had nothing but a table inside, a few laptops and screens on it showing different news stations, keeping track of the chaos. Crowds were surging up the high street, fires still burning in the police station. It looked like something out of a movie, almost too surreal for it to fully register.

A reporter was stood outside a building hung with a giant banner that looked like it had been spray painted onto a bedsheet, an Enforcer rams head with a red line through it, talking avidly to a man outside.

“Where’s that?” Lethe gestured at the screen.

“That’s the hotel they were housing everyone in who lost their homes in the fire.” Phil told him. “Like you did. Safe to say they aren’t pleased about what they learned. What happened?”

Niki quickly recounted what happened to Phil, who tilted his head to listen, brow furrowed in thought.

“Where’s Tubbo?” Ranboo looked around. “I thought he was going to be with you.”

“Change of plans. He’s uptown in a newsroom giving a live interview.” Phil told him. “I have people watching the building to make sure he’s safe.” He added in response to Niki’s frantic look.

“Speaking of news.” Wilbur motioned at one of the screens. A shaky helicopter circled the crumpled ruins of the warehouse, the metal sundered and crushed by who knows what. Kristin reached over, unmuting it quickly.

“...Syndicate members Lethe, Nemesis and Icarus, as well as an unknown third party are missing, presumed dead in the wreckage.” Tommy burst out laughing, out of shock or humour he didn’t know, but it was nice none the less.

“They were broadcasting the raid you know.” Phil told them, his gaze level. “Everyone saw the flood gates slam shut, watched them raid an empty hideout filled with flowers. They’re now only focusing on the surface destruction.”

“Really?” He breathed.

“It was supposed to be some big triumph over the Syndicate. Instead they turned themselves into a laughing stock. We slipped through their fingers again, they’re not taking it well.”

Wilbur beamed, reaching over and ruffling Tommy’s hair. “Look at you go, you’re just like your brothers already.”

Tommy couldn’t help but feel a warm glow spread through his chest at that. It was all beginning to crash in on him, the reality of what they’d done. It wasn’t really upset, just a confusing jumble of emotions he couldn’t quite untangle. He leaned against the wall, the empty rooms beginning to close in on him, pressing his hands against his chest in an effort to ground himself.

“Tommy.” Phil noticed immediately, walking over to Tommy’s chest was heaving, breathing heavy. “It’s alright.”

A tear slid down, cutting through the dust and dirt smeared on his cheek. Kristin reached up, wiping it away gently with a thumb. “You were a hero.” She said softly. “You are everything you always wanted to be, don’t forget that.”

“This is insane.”

“I know. I know.” She gave him a quick hug, not even caring about the dirt on his clothes that smeared across her dress.

“I was just thinking...” Wilbur spoke up suddenly, breaking from his restless pacing at last. He glanced around at the heads turning towards him, looking a little guilty. “Sorry. Wrong time?”

“What now?” Techno folded his arms, turning his head to his brother with a patient expression. “It better be good.”

All heads turned to him and Wilbur blinked slightly. He shrugged, carrying on. “Well, their guard is down, they think we’re down half our people. Their forces are split, all their attention is on the riots in town to the point they’re calling up Enforcer reserves.”

“What are you suggesting?” Niki asked warily.

“We need to retaliate, do something drastic.” Wilbur got to his feet, beginning to pace again. “I say we...”

“Wilbur.” Phil cut in with a click of his cane, a quiet warning. “I have a feeling I won’t like whatever you’re going to say.”

“I say we storm Pandora.”

Chapter End Notes

Fun little fact. The scene where Haven is found is inspired by that one scene in the Hunger Games where Peeta warns District 13 the capitol is coming and come to think of it, WHT!Jack and Peeta have a little in common, in the whole brainwashed by the government into a weapon sense. And hey, *slaps wht!jack on the head with a metallic ringing sound* This bad boy can fit so much unexpected sadness into him

The Penultimate one

Chapter Notes

USE WHT SPOILERS IF YOU'RE TALKING ABOUT THIS ON TWITTER ETC FOR THE PEOPLE WHO AREN'T CAUGHT UP

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

“Don’t be ridiculous.”

“It’s not ridiculous.” Wilbur insisted, beginning to pace again, brow furrowed in concentration. Tommy could almost see the metaphorical gears turning in his head.

“That place is a fortress. We said we’d never be able to get in.” Lethe looked just as shocked as the rest of them.

“We said that when there was three of us.” He pointed out. “You, me and Techno alone wouldn’t have had much chance of doing anything. But with Tommy and Niki and with all eyes elsewhere, we might have a shot.”

“You can’t be serious.” Tommy’s eyes were all wide.

“Never been more serious.” Indeed Wilbur’s expression was flat, there was no sign of a lie there. He stopped his pacing, turning to look at his father. “So?”

“You’ve lost your mind.” Niki cut in and Phil didn’t disagree, watching quietly.

“If we don’t do it we’ll still be in danger. Schlatt lost his only hold over us when Haven escaped, he’s going to start getting desperate. Where do you think he’s going to look next?”

Phil acknowledged this with a slight nod, tapping his fingers against the handle of his cane thoughtfully. “We have a plan. We need to stick to the plan.” He looked grim. “I understand what you’re saying, but it’s too dangerous.”

“I mean, he’s right?” Tommy asked quietly. “It’s a prison, that...”

“They’re human beings. Maybe there’s criminals in there but most are just ordinary people, they just get left in there to await trial on some trumped up charges for not registering.” Wilbur reminded him. “Schlatt will try and use them against us, he’ll stop at nothing when his power is threatened. We need to get the jump on him.”

“I don’t like it, but he’s got a point.” Techno said slowly. “We know they’re not above attacking a safe house, he’ll want to wipe out any potential allies.”

“As long as they’re there, they’ll be blackmail material if he gets desperate. And he’ll be desperate today.” Wilbur looked around all of them, forcing them to meet his gaze.

“Releasing a bunch of, well, criminals, as far as the law is concerned might not go down well with people. We could turn some of our supporters against us.” Kristin said softly. “Not that I don’t agree with you but we need to make sure we have all angles covered for everyone’s safety. Nothing can go wrong today.”

“This isn’t about how it makes us look. This is about them.” Wilbur began to pace again. “And you’re wrong about how it’ll look, especially for Schlatt’s supporters. He failed to wipe us out, and behind his back we crack open what’s supposed to be one of the most secure buildings in the country. Think about it.”

A strange quiet fell in the room. Phil had been silent for some time, listening rather than refuting anything they said,

“Phil? You can’t seriously be considering this.” Lethe turned on him. “You said this was insane.”

“Pandora is weakened right now.” He said slowly, as if mulling it over. “Most of their guards were taken to Haven, they were closest and the fastest to respond, it was deemed a safe risk.” That drew a few sniggers from the room.

“So, there aren’t as many guards?”

“My information says there’s maybe a quarter of what there should be.” Phil agreed. “That’s...a significant loss.”

“I mean, if we were to go ahead with it, remember what Tubbo said. They’re calling the military in.” Kristin told Phil, something clearly only they knew judging by the sudden attention Techno turned onto them.

“You didn’t tell us this.”

“They sent the news ahead to the newsroom he’s in so they can broadcast it to try and discourage more protestors from joining.” She explained to the others. “He passed it onto us. We don’t know anything more. We need everyone we can get, or we’ll be crushed before we’ve barely gotten started.”

“There’s no guarantee we’d be able to get back up from Pandora to the city centre in time, let alone that they’d even want to help. We would need so much more time to plan.” Phil looked torn. “This is reckless.”

“We don’t have time.” Wilbur brushed that aside.

“If we mess it up we could be looking at a catastrophe.” Phil warned them.

“But if we get it right then the Enforcers will have broadcast the raid of an empty Syndicate safehouse filled with flowers while their strongest prison is cracked open.” Wilbur finished for him. “Imagine what that would do.”

“If we do, metas won’t be afraid to join the protests if Pandora is gone. It’s all they’ve been hanging over our heads for years.” Tommy chimed in, slowly warming to the idea. “It’s all I was ever afraid

of.”

Niki sighed. “Tommy I would have thought you of all people knew how serious this was.”

“Yeah, I do.” He retorted. “You know I’m right. Even if there’s metahumans out there right now, they won’t be using powers or anything to defend themselves against the Enforcers because they’re still scared.”

“We have no way of getting in, and even if we could get inside we’d have to disable all the security, all the cameras, turn off all contact to the outside world because they’d rally backup for that place so fast.” Lethe argued. “We’ve been over this before. We don’t have the technical capacity for that.”

“We don’t.” Phil agreed. The mood seemed to die, even Wilbur looking frustrated, his hope dying a little. Niki suddenly stood up straight, like a lightbulb went off.

“I know someone who does.” She grabbed Wilbur’s wrist. “I know someone who can.”

“He left.” Lethe reminded her, still a little in disbelief that they were even entertaining the idea, which was less than reassuring to Tommy.

“I can contact him. I can.” She spun around, turning to Orpheus. “Android can do that. Android can help.”

“Will he help us though?” She looked lost for a moment, before regaining her confidence.

“Maybe if I ask, he will.”

Kristin slipped her phone out of her pocket without a word, handing it over. Phil didn’t try and stop her, the room falling silent as Niki dialed a number he didn’t recognise. It rang for a few beats, Niki’s face falling at every one but she stayed resolutely hopeful.

“Hello?”

“Jack?” She gripped the phone tighter.

“Niki? Is something wrong?” She bit her lip, pausing for a moment, eyed darting around the room as if hoping someone would give her an idea of what to say, but none came.

“No I uh. I need to ask a favour.”

“You already owe me.” He said lightly, but there was an undertone of suspicion, not aimed at her as much as knowing there was something she wasn’t saying. “I said I’d watch the boats as far as the safe houses, I don’t know how much I can do to help.”

She hesitated again. “Can I tell you when you get here? It’s too dangerous over the phone.”

“I’m far away, I have no idea where you are.” He was clearly curious, but he knew there was no way he’d make it back in time.

“Where are you? Lethe can come get you.”

“Suburbs, near that giant arcade by the river. Can you tell me anything?”

“I will when you get here.”

“Fine.” Jack said after a pause. “But you better explain everything.” The call shut off, leaving a hollow in its wake.

“Are we really doing this?” Tommy broke it at last, his mouth dry. Phil grabbed Wilbur’s arm. “You sense even a hint of trouble, you get back here. I can’t lose you. Any of you.”

“So you’re giving us permission to go.” Phil didn’t deny it.

“I’m giving you permission to try. Scout the area, nothing more until you have a plan, understand me?” That was enough for the room to start into motion, Ranboo holding out his hands.

“We can’t meet here. Where to.”

“Pandora. Far enough from the gates so they don’t see us, I need a good view.” Wilbur joined him.

“Are you sure, you’ve been doing a lot of teleporting today.” Techno slowed him with a hand on his shoulder, a little worried.

“I’m alright, I’m getting better.” Ranboo said, with more than a hint of pride. “I’m getting stronger. Don’t worry about me.”

“Tommy.” Kristin called out as he took Techno’s hand. “Please be careful.”

“I’ll be back.” He promised her.

“That wasn’t what I...” She cut off as they vanished.

Lethe set them down under a lone tree some way from the prison, the only shelter leading up to it. Even at a distance, the walls towered above him, dark and imposing. Steel watchtowers stood at every corner, manned by armed guards, lined with coils of barbed wire, a huge steel gate at the front. Inside rose the prison itself, a wall of dark concrete housed inside the courtyard, almost completely windowless.

A chill ran down his spine just looking at it. Getting in the gate meant passing two checkpoints and a pair of huge, solid steel doors. For hundreds of metres around the ground was covered in open concrete, cleared of any trees or anything that could hide their approach.

Ranboo appeared again, this time with Android in tow, the cyborg stumbling forward as they landed, looking a little shaken, knocking into the tree. He brushed himself off, trying to look a little more dignified, before staggering back realising the company he had, dropping into a defensive stance.

“Is this a trap?”

“Why would we want to trap someone that helped us.” Wilbur looked amused which wasn’t particularly reassuring. “Niki trusts you.” He added, realising that wasn’t helping.

“I have a bad feeling about this.” He looked back over them for a moment, probably checking one last time for weapons before stepping away. “What do you want.”

“You’re going to have a worse feeling in a moment. We want to break into Pandora.” Incredulity began to spread across the cyborg’s face but before he could say anything he was cut off. “We have to. If we don’t, Schlatt could kill them all, especially after what happened with Haven.”

“You’re...you want me to help you?” He’d never seen Android quite so lost for words before.

“Yes.” Wilbur said simply.

“You’re mad. Absolutely not.” Jack’s eyes were wide with horror, slowly backing away. “We get that a lot.” Achilles folded his arms casually, leaning against the tree.

“And if I say no?” He was back on the defense again, old habits dying hard, hand straying towards a weapon in his belt.

“Then we don’t.” He replied, keeping it short and simple. “Then Lethe returns you to where he found you and we go our separate ways. Simple as that.”

“You can’t get in there, there’s no way.” Android was horrified, but morbid curiosity was taking over against all his better judgement. “How could you even...”

“This was your idea.” Niki turned to Wilbur. “What’s your plan? I know you’re scheming one, you’ve got that look.”

“I’m so glad you asked.” Orpheus took a step forward, hands in the pockets of his trenchcoat, brow furrowed in thought. “I mean, everything we’ve thought up so far is too complex. No hope of getting away safely, too many guards, too many variables.”

“We don’t know where the prison warden’s office is.” Achilles countered. “That was the issue with that plan last time.”

“You brought me along and you don’t even have a plan?” Jack’s voice rose notably in panic, though he tried to hide it.

“Oh we’ll have one.” Achilles motioned at his brother. “He’s the brains, that’s what he likes to tell us anyway. Just give him a bit.”

“How hard can it be to break into an unbreakable prison.” Wilbur agreed, far too cheerfully.

“You’re all mad.” Android repeated. “I’m not having any part in this.”

“Wouldn’t have got this far if we weren’t.” Achilles walked up to his brother, nudging him.

“Orpheus? Anything?”

The words hung in the air for a few moments. “Well, several. It depends on our guest. All our old plans failed because we had no way of disabling the security systems.” Wilbur nodded thoughtfully, resting his chin on his hand, eyes narrowed. “Hypothetically, could you find some kind of access point to the prison network, what could you do?”

“Not much.” Jack folded his arms. “Only if I could get into the server room...”

“Hypothetically if you got in, could you shut it down, yes or no.”

“They’ll have backup generators, fail safes, executive permission needed to turn them off, the whole lot.” Jack said, shaking his head. “I won’t be able to get that permission without, I don’t know, someone important leaving the password lying around because that stuff is encrypted and would take several lifetimes for me to crack it. It’s not possible.”

“I can get that.” Wilbur began to grin. “I just have to ask.”

“I don’t think asking will...oh.” Jack trailed off, eyes widening. “*Oh.*”

“I’m sure I’ll manage.” Orpheus was smiling in a rather unsettling manner.

“I’m confused. You could have walked in the front door ages ago.” Jack said suspiciously. “Why now?”

“Too many variables, too few people, too many things could go wrong, no point blowing our cover like that, so many things.” Wilbur waved it aside. “I can only control so many people at once, Enforcers have like a five minute response time to get here usually, so so many reasons. Most people, even the best hackers are totally incapable of connecting to the network and taking it down like we need. But you’re not most people, so if I were to get what you need, what could you do.”

“Well.” The cyborg chewed his lip nervously, looking up and down the towers in the distance. “If I get to a central point with the right security credentials, I could do pretty much anything. The electric locks on the doors, the lights, cameras. But it depends what you’re thinking of.”

“So with weakened Enforcer numbers, all we need to do is get to the prison warden’s office, get his keys, and then that’s it?” Even Wilbur sounded a little stunned, though he covered it quickly.

“It’s a bit more complicated than that. Only if I’m able to disable the digital locks. It’s the other reason the Warden, capital W, brought me in, they wanted to see if I had some alternative. They have too many metas in there that could damage the locks if they got free so remotely locking them was the only alternative but that...”

“Left a weakness.” Wilbur’s eyes widened. “We don’t have to get inside to break it.”

“I told you he could help!” Niki crowed in triumph. Jack shook his head slowly, running a hand over his face in disbelief.

“I must have lost my mind. I’m risking my life by even telling you this.”

“I think we all have.” Niki said wryly. “But at this point maybe that’s what we need.”

“Can you not just...from here?” Achilles mimed typing mid air, earning himself a withering glare.

“The network will be closed, without an access point you don’t have a hope of getting in.” Lethe mumbled before anything broke into a fight. “And there’s definitely no access points outside the walls.”

Jack glanced over, giving him a slight nod of respect. “You’ve done this before.”
“I’m the heist man.” Lethe said casually.

“And the Enforcers they took from the prison? No chance they’ll come back?” Jack was tapping his metal fingers on his leg, over and over, staring at the towers in the distance.

“Thanatos said they were rallied to Haven, or to help with the riots. And the Haven ones are...otherwise occupied.” Achilles chimed in, playing with a leaf he’d plucked from the tree branches.

“They’re dead.” Jack stared at him in horror. “I counted so many, you killed them all?”

“No no.” Achilles waved that off quickly. “One of our own collapsed the escape back up to the surface. They’ll be buried underground for a while.”

“Haven has systems to bring air down from the surface, it’s how we survived down there.” Wilbur added. “We’re not murderers. How well do you know Pandora.” He directed this question at Jack, who was shifting his feet awkwardly.

“I’ve been in there a few times.” The cyborg said uncomfortably. “Putting people in.”

A cold wind stirred through the branches above them as if on cue. Niki looked as if she was about to ask something before her expression cleared to understanding.

“I have some things I need to set right.” The cyborg said awkwardly. “Which, I want on the record is the only reason I’m agreeing to this stupid thing that’s definitely going to get me killed.”

“Hey, have a little faith in us.” Orpheus shot him a casual grin, strangely at ease despite everything. “We’ve got a long reputation for getting away with the impossible. So what do you know.”

“There’s no way this works.” Jack muttered. He shrugged. “Whatever. There’s the walls, they’re so thick they have whole buildings inside, one at each corner. They house guards, equipment and at the far end, a server room.”

“And they just told you this?” Wilbur asked, amazed.

“I poked around.” Jack admitted. “I think the Warden noticed me doing it, I never got to go inside again so I hope they haven’t changed anything around. And like I said, they wanted me to fix the weaknesses.”

“Did you?”

“Obviously not, every solution risked putting the locks within reach of a meta. They were more worried about a break out than a break in. No one would be crazy enough to break in.” Jack explained, beginning to pace nervously. “Even the warden’s office is outside, away from the building because if even one suppression band breaks, all hell would break loose. Which is why you have to gain control of the situation before you even get to the prison itself. The walls of the main building are covered with the same energy suppression stuff they make the power blockers out of, it’s significantly weaker because it’s not directly cutting off the source but it’s still a risk.”

Wilbur turned on his heel slowly, staring at Niki. “Where has this guy been all this time.” He held up a warning hand. “Don’t answer that I already know.” Something in Tommy’s chest quickened, a strange sense, like maybe this was actually feasible.

“I think I’m going to be sick.” He whispered. Niki reached out her hand, taking his and squeezing it gently.

“We’ll be okay.” Tommy turned to look at Pandora, at the shape that had haunted him all his life, a distant threat on the horizon.

“We must be mad.” He whispered.

“No ordinary person would dream of it. Very few metas would have the abilities needed, and normally the amount of Enforcers in there gave even us pause. We couldn’t cover for every eventuality, couldn’t risk walking into the lion’s den, but maybe now.” Achilles adjusted his mask, furrowing his brow. “Maybe now. Now we have you, and her, and the robot.”

“What difference can we even make?”

“Admittedly Niki somewhat more than you.” Achilles said wryly. “Her abilities allow us to swamp huge areas of Enforcers, taking out a vast chunk of resistance. You, you’re useful in specific situations, you’ve got quick reactions and a lot of stubbornness, and you can fight like a cornered cat when you’re angry. And him, if he’s right he can take control of the prison and we’d hardly have to lift a finger.”

“That doesn’t solve how we get inside.” Jack said irritably. “I’ve never been in the main building, I don’t know how.”

“We’ll solve that when we’re inside. You should be able to access the prison plans once you get online, yes.”

“Hopefully? But I won’t know until I’m there and that’s...” Wilbur cut him off

“Icarus and Nemesis distract the guards, Achilles guard them while they do that, Android you remember where this server room is, yes? Then Lethe teleports us inside.”

“That’s risky.” Ranboo warned. “Even with a little more idea of what’s in there, porting into unknown locations is dangerous, for me and for you.”

“You’ve done riskier. Sit down with him, get him to tell you everything he remembers about the layout, it’s the best we have.”

“It’s on the far side, I remember that. And just one request.” Android held up his hand, stopping him. “Keep my name out of this when all this is said and done. I don’t want any part of the shitstorm that’ll come out of it if we don’t die in there.”

Orpheus accepted this with a dip of his head. “And we’ll make sure you get away safely. Don’t worry. Icarus, you know what to do, Me and Lethe, and Android will go to the other wall, and see if we can find this server building. Jack, you can get into our channels right?”

Jack paused for a moment, his red eye darting back and forth. “Like this?” His voice doubled. Ranboo and Jack moved away a few steps, heads together, talking quietly. Tommy began to rock back and forth on his heels, taking deep calming breaths, trying to shake out the nervous energy running through him, Niki pacing back and forth.

“Are you ready?” Orpheus smoothed his coat, doing one final check over his team.

“No.” He whispered. His brother reached out, squeezing his shoulder.

“You’ve got this. You’ve done crazier.”

“It’s not that easy Will.” He whispered. “This place, I’ve been scared of it my whole life and you really just want to walk in. I don’t know if this is possible.”

“If I spent all my time worrying about if something was possible, we’d have never done all the things we have. Have faith. We’ll make it, one way or another we’ll survive, we always do.” Wilbur assured him, his gaze steady. “You’re braver than you know, just like the rest of your family.”

“We won’t let anything happen to you.” Niki added. “You’re safe with us.”

“It’s not me I’m worried about.”

“Never is.”

Ranboo walked up to them, giving Wilbur a short nod, like if he spoke out loud he’d lose his nerve. They began to gather together in a small huddle. Wilbur looked them over one last time, before closing his eyes, whispering something under his breath before giving Ranboo the sign to go.

A rush of wind, and they were past the first two checkpoints, tucked away at the foot of the wall in the shadows. Tommy pressed his back against it, the cold stone seeping through his gloves. Lethe turned to teleport again and Tommy caught his sleeve.

“Stay safe.” Lethe didn’t reply, just squeezing his arm in response, before letting him go, vanishing again with the other two.

Niki glanced over at him, Achilles slipping away, staying just in the blindspot from the tower, creeping along the ditch at the wall's foot to who knew where.

"I need to find the mains, I know there's water here somewhere but I'm no use until I have a constant source." She whispered. "I'll draw a fog, it's the best I can do."

"As thick as you can get." Achilles agreed. Fog began to gather between her palms, seeping out over the stone, drifting up the walls, concealing them from sight.

"Orpheus. Please hurry." Nemesis murmured. "We don't have long. They'll figure it out soon."

She barely needed the water bottle at her waist any more, drawing moisture directly from the air bit by bit so as not to wear herself out, or draw suspicion too quickly. It began to rise around them, drifting over the concrete in a low cloud, up towards the towers, towards the guards.

Tommy reached his hand out, curling his fist in a ball. The metal of the watchtower at the far end of the prison began to bend, creaking to one side as he pushed it with everything he had. The guards inside began to scream and yell, clinging onto the railings, trying to grab onto belongings that were scattering everywhere.

His hands were shaking but he kept pushing. The guards were thrown to one side, their screams and shouts echoing over as they clung on for dear life.

"Icarus."

"I got it." He managed through gritted teeth.

"If they fall they die." Niki warned him. "Be careful, and don't overdo it."

"I don't want them to die. I just want to scare them." He let go, taking a step back, catching his breath. "Should take them a few minutes to figure out what happened."

"They'll be on high alert, they won't accept that." Niki warned him.

"Once a mentor, always a mentor." He quipped. She stopped for a moment, and then smiled wryly.

"Sorry, I don't even notice I'm doing it."

The fog was thicker now, setting heavy over them. Niki was struggling a little, sweat beading on her forehead.

"Orpheus hurry." There was a pause, a long agonising silence. He could hear the guards yelling in the distance, but the sound was slowly muted as the fog began to spread. There was no sign of Techno, he'd disappeared into the mist, scouting out down the wall.

"We're in. Guards are neutralised in the server room. We can move." Tommy felt the air rush out of his lungs as Jack's voice replied. "Orpheus is controlling one of them, we can open the gate but not for long, you need to hurry. Get to the front."

A looming shape appeared in the fog and he flinched back, only for Achilles to appear from it a moment later, holding up his hands. He motioned for them to follow him, running towards the gate. Achilles slammed his shoulder into the door, throwing it open.

The courtyard inside was barren and empty, buildings carved into the walls just like Android had said, a shipping container against one still in the process of being unloaded. Enforcers spilled out onto the courtyard, raising weapons. One lunged for an alarm, slamming his hand against it. A single wail rang out before it was swiftly cut off.

“I got some security clearance off the guards credentials, I can disable the alarm, but that won’t last long, as soon as someone with higher authority activates it I can’t do a thing.” Jack warned them. “You need to get me the highest access you can find, and fast.”

“Nemesis can you keep them busy?” Achilles ran towards the buildings.

“Gladly.” Niki strode forward, throwing her hand out. A small stream of water flowed out of the bottle at her side, forming a shield around her, storming towards her enemies. Achilles hovered for a moment, admiring it, shaking his head slowly.

“No wonder we didn’t stand a chance without her.”

“Achilles, help her until we find the water supply, Icarus, with me.” Wilbur ordered. “Spread out and search.”

Achilles barged down the door of one of the dormitories, turning to fend off two Enforcers running at him. Tommy dodged past, beginning to tear through the room, mostly Enforcer dormitories tidied with military precision, or locker rooms of riot shields and handcuffs and god knows what else.

The fog was filtering inside now, both a blessing and a curse, blocking the Enforcers from reaching him easily but also slowing his tracks. Shouts rang in from outside, mixed with clashing steel and the odd half wail of the alarm.

He ripped open one of the lockers to find a small pile of suppression bands lying inside, strangely small for all the hurt and damage they had caused. His blood ran cold, and he slammed it shut, a little stunned. That moment of distraction cost him, he didn’t hear the running feet behind him, two guards bursting in

He fought one off, slamming the door shut, shoving a cabinet in the way before he could open it again. There was a yell behind him, Wilbur materialising out of the fog, clocking the other Enforcer over the head with a baton he must have snatched from one of the rooms, sending him flying to the ground, flat on his face in the doorway inches from Tommy.

Tommy stepped over him, giving his brother a relieved nod in thanks but they didn't have any time to linger on it, running into the next room. It was all sealed folders, no sign of anyone at all.

"We're not having any luck." Wilbur reported. "Nemesis, how are you holding up. How much time do we have."

"I've got it handled, don't worry about me!" She called back over the earpiece, sounding pleased, like things were going well for her.

"Can confirm." Achilles chimed in wryly. "She's doing most of the work, you should see this."

"Kinda busy right now."

"I found him!" Lethe yelled suddenly. "I found the prison warden's office!"

Wilbur drew to a halt, cupping his hand over his ear to hear better over the yelling and clashing from the courtyard. "Where is he?"

"He's in the tower, in his office."

"We're in the dormitories." Lethe appeared next to them, grabbing them both, dropping them off inside a small, circular room inside one of the towers.

It was surrounded by monitors of cameras and all sorts of information scrolling across the screens, a small desk in the centre. Behind it stood an Enforcer with silver stripes on his shoulders, a small badge of a castle that looked somewhat like Pandora on it, pointing a gun straight at Orpheus's head.

"Open your mouth and I shoot."

Wilbur's eyes darted over to his brother, but he said nothing, he didn't need to. Moments later the gun shot out of the Enforcer's hand, flying up to the ceiling, smashing against it. He stared up at it, and then at Icarus, hands outstretched in the corner, dangling it above his head just out of reach.

Orpheus composed himself, letting go of Lethe's arm, holding one hand out, lips curling into a cold smile. "Nice try, but you didn't account for all of us. *How many Enforcers are left.*"

"They, they gutted the Enforcers station here to go help with the riots. We told them not to but they wouldn't listen, they, they-." The prison warden was squirming, trying to break free from whatever compulsion he had on him but to no avail. Wilbur's grin widened under his mask.

"Oh this is too good. *How many.*"

"Forty outside, maybe sixty inside?" Orpheus's smile widened. "What do you want!" The Enforcer scrambled back, staring between them.

"*You know what I want. Give it to me.*" He held his hand out. "*Your passwords.*"

The Enforcer reeled them off, almost paralysed with terror, but also a pure, unyielding hatred. Wilbur cleared his throat, taking a quick sip of water from the flask at his hip. "Did you hear that?"

"Affirmative." They could hear swift typing over their earpieces, Jack's voice curt, too focused to pay much attention. "Give me a minute."

Tommy's heart was pounding, waiting for the inevitable shoe to drop. He could see Lethe shifting anxiously but at the same time his nerves were easing. Somehow being inside was slowly rotting the mysticism. The prison now had a face, no more the dark shape on the horizon, and he wouldn't let himself be afraid of a building he knew.

The prison warden lunged for an emergency alarm at the far side but Tommy stopped him dead, holding him in place again. It was nothing like when he lifted himself with his powers, he could feel the Enforcer fighting against it, battling him, his enemy's eyes almost bulging with how hard he was fighting.

Wilbur looked around almost admiringly as he waited, pacing around the Enforcer infuriatingly out of his reach, not that the warden could move. "They really did put this place together in a hurry. This is all you have?"

"There's another, bigger office underneath the prison." Jack reported. "There's a whole array of tunnels and buildings down there, along with most of the infrastructure like water pipes and..."

"I'll check it out." Niki interjected without any hesitation. "Any prisoners?"

"None. They're in lockdown with the decrease in guards. Everyone's in their cells, no one's underground."

"Good." He had no idea what that meant, and Jack didn't care to ask, clearly fully focused on whatever was in front of him.

"I shut down most of the system, turn the lights off, disable most of the locks but you need to get inside before I can do any more." Jack warned. "And there's backup generators, they can't be remotely disabled, you have to hurry, if they bring the system back online it'll broadcast a warning that there's been a failure."

"Do it." Niki cut in, before Wilbur could say anything. "Quickly."

The lights snapped off but flickered back on seconds later. Wilbur cursed quietly, their hostage breathing a sigh of relief, but it was short lived. Moments later they were plunged into darkness again, all the lights and monitors vanishing.

A quiet giggle came over Tommy's earpiece. "I found the water pipes." Niki reported happily, sounding more than a little pleased with herself.

"She found a lot more than that, both generators are offline, completely flooded." Jack added. "They have a battery powered backup for the locks only, I need the warden to disable that."

"That's all Nemesis, thank you." Orpheus replied, a slow grin spreading. "And remember, it's not polite to gloat." He added, clearly also gloating. "Now. *Give me the key*."

The warden held out a shaking hand, clinging onto the keychain as hard as he could but it was hopeless. It dropped from his fingers, and Orpheus snatched it triumphantly.

"Orpheus hold on." Android drew him short. "You need him. Gates locked by bionic scanners, they'll only open for certain approved people. He's one of them, anything else and it'll alert Enforcers." "I mean I imagine we've already more than alerted them but might as well make sure. *Get up*." He forced the prison warden to his feet, grabbing his arm, driving him forward out of the door.

Tommy followed down a spiraling set of stairs, carved into the concrete of the tower. Achilles was waiting for them outside, pacing back and forth along a line of kneeling Enforcers. Niki stood over them, pillars of water touring above her sharpened almost into blades, hovering over their heads in warning.

Part of the ground by the wall had ruptured open, a gaping hole below into what must have been the remains of the generators, now a twisted and gnarled hunk of metal, sparks running over the surface. Tommy's mouth hung open a little but he shut it quickly, trying to mimic the Syndicate around him.

"How are you staying so calm?" Tommy whispered, hovering as close to Techno as he could, feeling small in the shadow of the walls. "How do you make it look so easy?"

"Practice." Achilles whispered back.

"This is too easy. It has to be." Tommy's hands were shaking.

"Don't stop." His brother whispered. "Don't think about it, don't hesitate, for even a moment. If we hesitate, they shoot." They watched as Wilbur caved through the centre of the courtyard, heading straight for the door, not hesitating for a moment.

"That's not reassuring."

"Trust Orpheus. He knows what he's doing."

Orpheus drew to a halt up ahead, pushing the prison warden forwards. "*Go on. Open the door*." The warden held up a shaking hand to the door, waiting for the scanner to run over it, before stepping up, opening his eyes so the scanner could cross them. It went red.

"The prison's in lockdown, I can't do anything." He tried. "It's sealed."

“He can override it.” Jack told them, listening closely over the earpiece. “Don’t listen, he’s lying.”

“ *Override it.* ” The Enforcer turned to stare at him, slack-jawed but he couldn’t do anything. “*I said override it.*”

“Override code 11492, it’s a false alarm.” He managed through gritted teeth through the intercom next to it.

“Sir are you...”

“You heard me.” The light went green. The doors creaked open, with a slow grinding of metal against metal that sounded like a death knell.

“ *Sleep.* ” The Enforcers around the courtyard folded in place, toppling over, row by row. Orpheus turned slowly on his heel, waiting for his Syndicate to join him, before striding into Pandora.

A small holding area lay inside, a few cells around the walls, lockers and a changing room at one edge. A rubbish bag filled with what looked like prisoner belongings was half flowing out of a bin. Everything was plastic, no metal, bolted to the floor or even better, made out of the concrete itself. Cold, harsh, and sterile.

Wilbur turned without warning, shoving the prison warden into a small guard room, locking him inside before the man even had a moment to react. He checked the handle to make sure it was secure before turning to follow them.

“What are you doing?” Tommy asked, confused.

“If I unlock the door, he’ll die.” Orpheus told him calmly, tucking the spare keys away in his trench coat. “They’ll tear him apart. Which he deserves but I’d rather he suffer for this. And that there’s no blood on anyone’s hands, especially not ours.”

“No one’s coming.”

“He’ll be found. Some time. I don’t care if it’s a few days.” He tossed the key card to Techno, who caught it with a strange expression but didn’t say anything as the door at the other end slid open.

Marching feet echoed up ahead, running towards them. Tommy dropped back into a defensive position, the rest of the Syndicate gathering around him, noticeably shielding him and Ranboo first, forming up around them.

A group of guards ran around the corner, one Enforcer coming running towards him. Tommy grabbed his arm, letting out a yell as he did so, tossing him aside into a wall with all his strength. The Enforcer slid down it, groaning, and he moved to knock him out but Techno grabbed his arm. “Keep moving. We don’t have time.”

He propelled him forward into the corridor beyond. It was dark, the corridors barren and empty, the lights flickering. Their feet echoed on the floor, off sterile concrete.

“It feels evil.” Tommy whispered. “Feels wrong.”

“Power suppressors probably haven’t fully powered down. Be careful, don’t rely on your abilities right now.” Techno replied.

“That’s not what I meant.” He muttered.

“Try not to think about it.” He could hear water dripping somewhere it was so quiet. Their footsteps echoed, his breathing oddly loud in the silence.

He wondered if he’d have done this walk if Kristin hadn’t saved him, if he’d have followed Eret into these dark corridors, dwarfed next to the towering Enforcers that would have marched him alongside that awful, empty feeling that the suppression bands left behind. He knew now that Techno would have never let that happen, that the Syndicate would have risked everything for him but still, that little

Niki gave him a sympathetic look, somehow sensing the turmoil he was feeling. Orpheus strode ahead, carrying a grim determination in his step. It was almost unsettling how casually he took command, a world away from the fumbling nineteen year old trying to buy Tommy takeaway food to smooth over arguments, or stuttering through his words trying to hand him a piece of paper, but at the same time it was strangely comforting.

Guards ran out of a small room to one side, clearly having been interrupted in the middle of something. Orpheus didn’t even stop, raising one hand.

“*Sleep*.” They collapsed where they were standing. More appeared, swept aside in an instant by Nemesis and Achilles. Any resistance was dealt with before Tommy even really realised it was there, Nemesis out for blood, stalking down the corridor up ahead.

“He wasn’t lying, they really gutted this place of guards. It should be crawling with them.” Achilles looked around a little amazed, his voice echoing in the empty hallway “Every estimate we saw said two to three hundred at a time.”

“Idiots.” Niki’s eyes were glowing a soft blue, a halo of water streaming around her, watching for any danger but there was barely anything at all.

“We’re just walking in.” Tommy breathed.

“Well, you are, we had a nasty fight outside.” Achilles said, smiling slightly. “But you didn’t need to see that.”

“I told you.” Orpheus’s eyes were alight with that fire, that slightly fanatical one. “This was the time we had to strike. They’d never see it coming.”

Sure enough, the door ahead was dark, the lock disabled. Achilles slammed his shoulder into it, tearing the door right off it’s hinges, stepping over it calmly. They walked straight past, totally unopposed to the cell block.

A long room lay ahead of them, lined with cells on either side, going up floor by floor above them, the centre of the building open, metal walkways running around the floors, all plunged in almost total darkness, save for the guards' flash lights.

The guards inside were in disarray, running around to see what was happening. They were too confused to even notice the Syndicate appearing in their midst at first, a vital few moments that cost them everything.

Niki surged in, sweeping a row off their walkway, sending them crashing to the floor below in a torrent of water that barely cushioned their fall, leaving them gasping like beached fish on the floor, Achilles knocking two more to the ground. Tommy tackled one by the legs, more reckless impulse than actual plan of attack, throwing him to the floor, tearing the helmet off another, slamming his elbow into the Enforcers nose.

A baton slammed into his head, smacking against his mask which protected him from the worst of a hit that would have broken his jaw otherwise but it sent him staggering, tripping over the unconscious body of a guard behind him, slamming him into the floor.

Stars were dancing in front of his eyes, his head spinning. The Enforcer who'd knocked him drew a pistol from his belt, pointing it down at him.

"No!" A shape slammed his opponent out of the way. He dragged himself up to see Lethe in front of him, teleporting the guard away, dropping him five metres further down. The guard panicked, his finger closing on the trigger. No one had any time to react, the shot going off almost in slow motion.

Tommy screamed, lunging towards him as Lethe vanished into the air again but Orpheus was faster, storming towards them with a raging fury, his long coat flying out behind him.

"**STOP !**" His voice boomed out across the room, ringing through the stone. Even though it wasn't aimed at him Tommy felt his eyes sinking a little just from the sheer power of it, unlike anything he'd ever heard from his brother before. "Go to **SLEEP.**"

The guards began to crumple, one by one, their guns falling from their hands, clattering to the ground, their owners following. Tommy grabbed one about to topple over the railings, dragging him back to safety, disarming him of his weapons and keys.

"Lethe!" Orpheus strode over to the younger boy, who had reappeared, dropping to one knee a little way away, clutching his shoulder. "Are you-." He couldn't finish his sentence, breaking down into coughing, his hand flying to his mouth.

"Scratched me. Didn't port fast enough." Ranboo said quickly. "I'm fine, I'm fine, I'm okay."

“Nemesis, help him.” Achilles took charge, his brother struggling to breathe. Wilbur leaned against the wall trying to breathe before, sliding down it, clutching his throat.

“We need to-.” Orpheus trailed off, unable to finish, coughing into his sleeve. He looked pale, beads of sweat on his forehead, his voice scratched and rough.

“You don’t need to do anything. Stay still. And be careful.” Achilles warned him. “We need you strong.”

“We need this done as quickly as possible.” His voice was rough, and ragged. He took a long draught of water from a flask on his belt. “I’m alright. Stop fussing.” Achilles didn’t move away. Tommy scrambled to his feet, the shock dispelling, staggering over. His ribs were aching, no doubt about to bruise but he didn’t have time for that.

Lethe’s sleeve was torn, blood welling on his shoulder but he wasn’t badly hurt, the bullet embedded in the wall behind him. Niki was bandaging it quickly using supplies she’d stolen from the guard room, securing it in place.

“Fucking idiot.” Tommy punched Ranboo’s uninjured shoulder, but there was no strength behind it.

“Why the hell did you do that.” There was no real anger, there never was.

“We’re basically even now.” The other boy replied, his voice a little strained. He gave Tommy a half smile, his mask pushed up a fraction to let him breathe.

All told nearly fifty guards had fallen, knocked completely unconscious in the blink of an eye by one man. Once again Tommy was swiftly reminded how glad he was that Wilbur was on his side, though it had taken a fair toll on his brother. Wilbur’s breathing was ragged, coughing so hard Tommy thought he might be sick, but he was slowly recovering, taking sips from his water flask, staring off into the distance.

“The people in the cells?” Niki asked anxiously, once Orpheus had regained himself a little.

“It won’t affect them.” Achilles answered for him to spare his voice. “Not unless Orpheus got really clumsy.” He took the keys from Wilbur, handing it to Tommy, distributing the other copies to the Syndicate. “Go, get as many out as possible, as fast as you can. We don’t have time to waste, not with Orpheus down.” Tommy hesitated, still almost hypnotised by the strange horror of the place they were in. “Icarus, we have to move.” Achilles prompted him.

He jolted into action, sprinting for the nearest cell door, nearly tripping over in his haste. He held his breath, but he didn’t need to, the door clicked open as he twisted the key, the digital lock completely disabled.

It swung open slowly, the hybrid inside a yellow feathered bird hybrid of some kind, her wings too small to bother restraining in any way, the sleeves of her shirt torn off to reveal scarred arms, her orange jumpsuit tied around her waist. She was watching him with a wary suspicion, ready to defend herself.

“I’m a friend. I’m a friend.” He spread his hands to show he was unarmed. “I’m here to help, I can get you out of that.” He motioned at the band, waving the keys. She leapt at him, snatching it out of his hand before he could do anything.

The band popped off her arm and she breathed a sigh of relief, slowly stretching her wings out, turning to regard him with a little less suspicion.

“Can I have it back. I need that, for the others.” He asked, fighting to keep his voice steady, hating the fear in it, the strange trembling that Pandora brought over him, holding his hand out for the key.

“The...others?”

“It’s safe, you can go outside. The guards are gone, my friends are freeing everyone else.” The words spilled out in a breathless rush, he hadn’t prepared anything to say

“They’re freeing people?” Her eyes widened. “You’re serious.” Before he could even respond she barged past him, shoving him clean into the wall, not with any kind of malice just a wild desperation, dropping the key in her haste. “Cellbit. Cellbit!”

Tommy watched her go, a little stunned and reeling but he didn’t have time to process what had just happened. He picked himself up, going door to door in a kind of mechanical haze. Faces stared back at him in orange jumpsuits, all sorts of hybrids, all mix and manner of people. Their eyes regarded him with mistrust, fear, anger, hope, and everything in between.

As word began to spread they ran to meet him, pushing their hands through the little slots in their doors that guards used to hand out food, fingers reaching towards him, begging, grasping. Vines were crawling across the floor, the stone walls bent and warped. Metal doors had been snapped clean in two. The lights were on, and only the lights, a meta in the corner with one hand to the wires fuelling them with a flow of electricity that crackled across his fingers.

There was a strange energy in the room, life filling the desolate concrete walls. The guards were being dragged away, their torches, weapons, armour, anything taken. Tommy began to steady himself, his fear settling.

As more and more spilled down from the upper floors it resolved into joy of a kind he couldn’t quite express, a release of a weight he didn’t even know he held, lifting him up and powering him along as he kept going. The fear faded, and was replaced by an exhilarating triumph, the feeling really sinking in, they were doing it, they’d done it.

The inmates had started taking charge among themselves, keys being handed along the lines, a pile of bracelets in the corner. He could hear sobbing, screaming, people were searching through the crowd for friends. The dead and empty building came to life, glowing lights floating around the crowds heads to illuminate their way where the lights didn’t reach.

“Eret? Have you heard of Eret?” He began to push through the crowd, looking around. “Hello? Anyone? Have you seen Eret? They were taken here a few weeks ago.”

He only got shaking heads or blank looks. Most were too distracted to respond, some were looting the unconscious guards for handcuffs, guns and whatever else they could get. He began to run up the stairways, his boots ringing on the metal walkway, pushing through, repeating over and over.

A hand settled on his shoulder and he turned to see Wilbur looking down at him sympathetically, finally recovered enough to stand. "I'm sorry. But we have to go." His voice was still a little rough.

"Just a little longer, I need to..." The words died on his lips, a shred of hope dying with it. Orpheus just stood there for a few more moments, giving him time.

"I'm sorry. It'll have to wait." He said as gently as he could. Tommy nodded slowly, biting his lip. He hated it, but he knew his brother was right, they were running out of time fast.

"What now?"

Wilbur laughed a little. "You know I didn't think this far."

He blinked as they emerged into the day, the sudden change from the dark of the prison dizzying but Wilbur didn't pause, striding on ahead, guiding the newly freed prisoners out behind him. A few people were starting to follow, dazed and confused in the daylight.

"What the hell happened back there." Tommy muttered.

"I panicked." Wilbur said stiffly. "Don't worry about it, won't happen again."

"You panicked and knocked out fifty people." Wilbur drew to an abrupt halt, his expression troubled. He didn't say anything, just shaking his head, looking a little frustrated but only at himself.

"I wasn't careful. I can't afford to lose control like that."

"Hey it helped! And it was cool as hell." Tommy sped up to keep up with his long strides, grinning a little, trying to cheer him up. It worked, a slightly proud smile tugging at the edge of his brother's mouth. "You think so?"

More and more were spilling out after them, a fresh looting spree beginning. The last few pockets of Enforcer resistance were being wiped out, the windows on the dormitories smashed, glass on the floor, a full scale riot tearing through. The rest of the guards left outside were handcuffed and led away by some of the calmer inmates before the seething anger and years of pent up frustration spilled over into more than just breaking windows.

"We need order. Or this will get out of hand." Orpheus turned, eyeing a shipping container in front of the wall. Someone had already broken in, the metal in a molten heap on the floor, raiding what must have been a fresh shipment of food and supplies for the prison, distributing it among each other. He recognised a few faces he'd freed appearing and vanishing as they were swallowed by the growing group flooding into the sunlight.

"Help me up." He boosted his brother up, flying up after him, curious on what he was up to. "Get to the gate." Wilbur relayed over their earpieces. "I'm going to need a show of strength for this one."

“On my way.” Niki confirmed. Tommy pressed a hand to his chest, trying to calm his beating heart just a little, refusing to show fear.

“Thanatos?” Wilbur said quietly. “Are you there?”

“I’m here.” Phil’s voice was crackling in and out.

“We’re safe, we’re okay.” Tommy relayed. “We got them out.”

“Report... when the signal...” He said something else, but it was lost in a crackle of static.

“Android can you do something about the signal?”

“The signal blocking is on a separate system, I can’t access those.” Jack reported. “It’s based further out from the prison, we’re okay close together but as soon as it tries to pass the prison boundary the interference messes any signal up.”

“Alright. Are you done?”

“All done.” Android confirmed. “Unless there’s anything else you need me for, I’m getting out of here.”

“We can’t thank you enough.” Wilbur was smiling, shaking his head as he studied their handiwork, the fog clearing over a prison in chaos, its guards handcuffed and locked in their dormitories.

“We’re ready.”

Tommy looked back later to find Nemesis stood on the wall top looking down at them, water wrapping around her hands, keeping watch in case of trouble. Lethe was perched on a ledge nearby, eyes scanning the crowd. Achilles pulled himself up onto the container with them, keeping a protective eye on his brothers as Wilbur smoothed his coat, preparing himself.

A few people were turning to pay attention, seeing that something was happening, or just fascinated by the strange figures in white masks.

“You need them to quiet.” Achilles said, eyebrow raised slightly, “If you’re planning to make a speech. Any louder and you risk your voice.”

“My voice is fine.”

“Listen up!” Tommy yelled, but his voice sounded pitiful over the clamour. He looked to Wilbur for help, a little lost.

“*Quiet!*” Wilbur’s voice snapped out across the courtyard, echoing over their heads. The noise dimmed, faces turning to the makeshift stage.

“We don’t have long, so I’ll keep it brief. My name is Orpheus. This is Achilles, Nemesis, Icarus and Lethe, we are the Syndicate, we are ones who freed you.” He purposefully left Jack’s name out of it, just as he’d asked. “The guards are gone. The Enforcers are busy containing massive riots uptown,

Schlatt's government is crashing down around his ears, the world you are coming out into is not the one you left behind."

Whispers broke out, barely kept at bay by Wilbur's compulsion, one he wasn't holding very hard Tommy noted.

"You can run if you want, get to safety, there's no one left to stop you, you put as much distance between here as you can and get to the border, there's a train leading from the main station platform one in thirty minutes that will take you far away from here, there's no Enforcers, no one is watching the toll stations. Or you can stay, and you can help us."

"Help how!" The woman Tommy had freed first was at the front of the crowd now, wings bristling in defiance. A man next to her, tall and scarred, a white streak in his hair held her back, hushing her to listen.

Orpheus grinned, spreading his arms wide, the image of charisma. He barely needed to use his abilities, they seemed so intrigued by the sight of the strange man in the trench coat and mask that they stayed quiet, hanging on his every word

"I'm so glad you asked. As I said, Schlatt's government is crumbling. There is rioting in the streets, they're bringing in the military to stop them. If you want to stay and help, you can, but I have one request. We don't want bloodshed, we don't condone it. I know you're angry and I understand, but that is not the way forward."

"Who the fuck are you to tell us what we get to-." The man who'd called out was quickly hushed by the person next to him.

"We are the people who have been fighting this government for years." Wilbur retorted. "The people who were on the front lines, who orchestrated Schlatt's downfall, exposed him and freed you. I'm not looking for thanks, I am only asking for one thing in return, that if you choose to stay and fight, you do not kill. My request is simple, the choice is yours."

A few began to walk over, one or two at first, and then more and more taking their lead. Whispered thanks, crying, weeping, stoic faces, all sweeping past towards the sundered gate, flooding out. There were too many, cramming in, trying to fit through.

There was a rumbling noise all of a sudden. The wall began to crack, a meta nearby holding his hands out. Niki's eyes lit up. She reached out, slamming a wall of water into it, widening the cracks further, bits and pieces beginning to fall. More joined her, the water hardening to ice, forcing the stone apart. The combined anger of the inmates turned towards the walls, some collecting in one part, others just taking their anger out on anything in sight.

The stone began to shake, the rumbling growing louder and louder. All at once, they fell. The wall by the gate came crumbling down, throwing up dust and rubble, spilling out into the world beyond. A cheer rose up, the crowd surging towards it, the frontrunners skipping over the boulders left behind, holding their hands out to pull each other over the wreckage.

Even in that exhilarating moment of freedom they didn't forget about each other, making sure everyone made it over, old or young, a few held up as they sobbed into each other's shoulders. More wavered at the entrance, as if they weren't quite sure it was real, as if it was some kind of trap.

A few more still walked a wary circle around the Syndicate, keeping their distance. The suspicion had waned, but they still regarded them with a somewhat wise distrust, no doubt in part built from years of propaganda, but those were few and far between.

"They know us." Tommy said softly. "They recognise us."

"Of course they know us." Orpheus watched the crowd begin to surge past. "Why wouldn't they?"

"They look at us like we're gods." Niki breathed. "What a terrifying thought."

"Well, as long as they listen. Is that everyone?" He seemed nonplussed at the strangeness of it all, pacing back and forth slowly, arms folded, looking down thoughtfully. Tommy wasn't even sure if that was part of his act any more. He didn't even know if Wilbur realised how much of it was or wasn't an act.

"A few stayed in their cells. They're afraid of the consequences." She said sadly, looking out towards the cellblock. "I tried to talk to them but I get it."

Wilbur nodded slowly. "There's nothing we can do for them. I'll ask Thanatos if he can send people in to check up on them." He paused for a moment, doing one last sweep of the area. "We're done. Lets get out of here."

"We cracked open Pandora." Niki said softly. "We really did it."

"They, the city need to know what happened here, and what Haven was." Jack spoke up suddenly. "They deserve to know the truth."

"There's no way of proving it. It's our word against theirs." Lethe spread his hands helplessly. "What can we do?"

"They know. And that's all we need." Achilles agreed.

"You really don't care?" Jack eyed him suspiciously, clearly not buying it.

"By the time that news ever breaks we'll hopefully be long gone." Wilbur told him. "Out of this city and away." He took a long deep breath. "Oh how they'll hate this story. We walked in the front door, can you imagine what the papers will say."

"Lets not rest on our laurels yet." Achilles warned him. "There's still time for it to go wrong." Orpheus sobered a little, but barely at all.

Jack strode up to them, looking a little awestruck. Achilles was first to react, stepping forward to his old foe, holding out his hand. Jack took it, shaking it slowly, a firm grasp.

“For everything you’ve done today, the Syndicate will be here if you ever need us.” Techno told him solemnly. “We owe you.”

“That’s much more reassuring than it would have been this morning.” The cyborg admitted, almost with a smile.

“Won’t you stay?” Niki asked softly. “After everything.”

“I’ll take them to the train station, the ones that want to leave.” He said quietly. “And then I’m going to get far away from here.” He held out his hand to Wilbur begrudgingly.

“I don’t always like what you do. But I can’t deny you did good.” He pointed at Tommy. “That doesn’t apply to you.”

“Oh fuck you. You’re still a prick.” Tommy muttered, without much strength behind it. Jack slowed as he walked over to Niki.

“After this is over we’re going to have a long talk.” He said shortly.

“You’re not still angry at me, are you?” Her voice shook a little, watching her old friend as he wavered in place.

“No.” He said at last. “But that doesn’t mean I don’t want answers.”

“Soon.” She promised. “I’ll see you again soon.”

He strode away, calling out for people to follow him, waving his arms to try and gather them into a coherent group. They set off in a long trail, snaking towards the train station on the other side of town. The Syndicate watched him go, the moment strangely poignant, silence falling just for a little while as they caught their breath.

“Fuck.” Tommy stared at his hands. “Someone pinch me. This can’t be real.” Wilbur’s eyes lit up with glee, lunging towards him. “Not you bitch!” His ribs stretched as he tried to dodge, aching badly, he could already feel the bruise forming, stopping him in place. Wilbur’s glee switched to concern, his brow furrowing but Tommy just waved it aside.

“I’m fine. It’s fine.”

“Thanatos? Hestia, are you there.” Niki pressed her hand to her earpiece, covering her other ear to block out their bickering.

“We hear you loud and clear.” Kristin’s voice came back in. “Are you safe?”

“We’re all fine. We’re done, Lethe was mildly injured but other than that we’re okay.” Achilles confirmed.

“What happened?” Phil asked, a note of worry just audible.

“It’s a long story, but the inmates are free, guards trapped, Android shut down all the systems, Nemesis flooded their generators. It won’t be operational for a long time, if ever.”

“Good work. I’m thoroughly impressed by all of you, you’re making us very proud.” The praise made Tommy’s heart swell until he could have sworn it would burst. “I wish there was more time to celebrate this, but there’s no time. Tubbo is in the city centre, he’ll need backup. Go there.”

The noise came first, washing over them in waves, the roar and crash of stomping feet and yelling. It had gotten wilder since they were last here, shopfronts were nothing more than shattered glass, random rubbish bins in flames.

Tubbo was up on a makeshift stage of scaffolding no less, standing framed against the ruins of the city hall, the dome half rebuilt. His beanie was nowhere to be seen, his horns proudly on display for once. The buildings around were filled with people, hanging out of the windows, waving flags on the rooftops, the plaza in front of the hall packed to bursting.

“He is not fit to lead. I’m calling for my father to surrender, and for the violence to end.” Tubbo called, the megaphone just about loud enough for people to hear him. “It’s over, for him and every corrupt official in his government. Every crime they have committed against the people of this country demands he resign and order the Enforcers and the military to stand down.”

He said more, but it was drowned out by the crowd, surging and yelling. He stepped off the stage, brushing down his sweater nervously, searching for someone. His eyes landed on their little group with more than a little relief, his shoulders falling as the tension drained from them.

“Tubbo? You shouldn’t be out here. You’re in danger.” Niki looked frantic, grabbing him by the shoulders, checking him over to see if he was injured.

The president's son gave her a lopsided smile. “Hi. The place I was at got raided. ‘Bout the same time as the Haven raid so I didn’t know where else to go.

“Trying to split our focus.” Orpheus scowled.

“Which might have worked, if your arsonist wasn’t outside. Is he okay?” Tubbo turned to look at Tommy, eyebrow raised. “He seems to have some unregulated anger issues.”

“Eryn? Last I saw he was having the time of his life.” Tommy grinned back at him. “Let him have fun.”

“Why are you out here?” Niki demanded again. “We need to get you inside.”

“I’m fine.” He almost shrugged her off but stopped short, no doubt anticipating the telling off he’d get.

“You’re embarrassing him.” Tommy teased.

“They need to see me. They need to know it’s real.” Tubbo argued with her. “I’ve gotta do this. Trust me.”

“You shouldn’t be out here.” Niki insisted. “It’s not safe. Your face is on every television between here and the border, you’ll be a target. You need to leave.” Niki said gently.

“No. They need to see me.” Tubbo insisted. “Or they’ll say it’s fake.”

“You’re not going to believe what we just did.” Tommy began, but Tubbo just pointed up wordlessly to huge screens above their heads, normally flooded with advertisements but now every single one showed a newsfeed.

A helicopter was circling over the shattered walls of the prison, watching as the last few people helped each other over the ruins of the wall, picking their way down, confused and bewildered but celebrating, cheering, waving fearlessly to the helicopter above. The destruction was clearer than ever, holes punched in the walls of the building, plants forced up through the concrete, the metal of the gates bent like play dough.

“Phil. Is this your doing?” Achilles asked suspiciously. A soft laugh drifted down their earpieces.

“You wanted a show. I made it happen.”

They stared at it for a few minutes, even though they’d been there moments before it seemed so strange from above, like something someone else had done, so unreal that it didn’t quite register.

“Soldiers keep coming, we don’t have long.” Orpheus broke them out of the trance.

“Don’t worry. We brought help. Just give it a minute.”

“I sent word ahead to some of the organisers, there’s people waiting to guide them up. They’ll find you.”

There was confusion, people milling around aimlessly, the drive faltering for a moment while they tried to recollect, tried to work out what was happening. A lump stuck in Tommy’s throat.

“Oh no.”

“Just wait.” Wilbur promised, never wavering from his course, not even for a moment. “Wait and see.”

The Enforcers and assorted soldiers took advantage of the confusion, taking the moment to regroup their shield wall, mounting a new offensive. Tommy held his breath.

“There!” People were beginning to trickle in, orange beginning to filter through the crowd, those with wings, or others who could fly, racing ahead across the city to reach the action. Some began to drop others they’d carried with them, flying back for more, a tide of orange jumpsuits flickering in.

The Enforcers hesitated, not sure what to do. That hesitation cost them dearly. In an instant they were disarmed, their shields rusting, paint flaking, falling to the ground. Wind was rushing through the streets, a meta guiding it from a nearby rooftop, building into a gale as it slammed into the shield wall facing them sweeping the Enforcers aside like dominoes. Their shields were crumpled and tossed aside, their trucks were burning.

Time seemed to freeze for a moment. Then came the roar, louder and stronger than anything he’d heard before. The crowd moved forward with a renewed strength, shifting and surging like it was itself a living being, taking on a mind of its own. And right now that mind drove up, towards the upper districts, towards the president's mansion.

The Syndicate could only follow, Wilbur at the head of the crowd like some kind of twisted piper, leading the horde onwards. It wasn’t even a fight any more. Any resistance they faced was starting to turn and run. It surged over anything it came into contact with, a living river of people, with all the currents and eddies, and that unending roar of voices as it rushed up the hill.

They watched in silence for a little while, almost in awe at the sight. There was no point trying to help now, they hardly needed it. No one spoke, they could only watch, Tommy’s breath clean taken away. Half the city must have been out, the mass of people as far as the eye could see, and the noise, the noise was unlike anything he’d ever heard, would ever hear.

“They’re going straight for the mansion. If the mob gets to him they’ll tear him apart.” Ranboo said quietly.

“You know somehow I can’t quite find it in me to care.” Techno folded his arms, his voice icy. “Let them.”

“They’ve nearly made it. Hurry!” Niki ran ahead, waving them to follow. They found themselves a perch on the rooftop of a nearby government building, the roofs now the only safe place from the seething beast below and even they were flooding with people coming to watch.

The gates of the presidential mansion had been briefly forced open, a few people here and there managing to make it through the lines, sprinting towards the distant building, up the avenue of trees. The soldiers didn’t even try and pursue them, clearly relying on those inside to stop the flood, unable to turn their attention away.

“Puffy?” The ram hybrid slowed to join them, clean out of breath, her uniform marked with soot and torn. She shook her head slowly, staring around.

“I’ve never seen anything like this. I hope you know what you’re doing.”

“Not really.” Orpheus said happily. “But that’s half the fun isn’t it.” She gave him a blank stare. “It’s out of our control now.” Achilles said softly. “It was always going to happen. Most will respect our wishes.”

“What have we done.” Tommy breathed, staring at the chaos in front of him.

“What we had to.” Orpheus cut him off before he could spiral. “Only what we had to.”

“What’s happened here?” Niki asked, trying to catch Puffy’s attention “How has it been going?”

“A lot of injuries, the crowd is barely in control, but the hospitals are on alert, I’ve just been focusing on getting people out. But we lost contact with Blaze half an hour ago.” She looked worried sick. “I haven’t told Eryn yet but it’s not looking good.”

Tommy’s eyes widened a little, but he had no time to ask any further, a sudden ringing noise drawing his attention. The gates finally swung shut, the military piling in around them, trying to seal them off, nearly swamped.

“Where’s Tubbo?” Niki ran up looking frantic. “I can’t see him anywhere. Where did he go?”

“I don’t know, he vanished.”

Tommy turned, looking around urgently. A flash of green caught his eyes, one of the last to duck through the gates right before they closed, vanishing behind the trees.

“He went inside!” Tommy yelled. “He went in.”

“You’re joking. What is he thinking.” Niki stared at the gates, torn. Rioters were starting to gather together, helping lift each other up, clambering up the walls and fences, some already equipped with bolt cutters to tear down the barbed wire.

They were barely held off, the remaining Enforcers now pinned against the walls. “The military is moving in, if they find him in there...” She began, trailing off

“They’ll kill him. Not everyone knows he’s with us, and even those that do well, he’s still Schlatt’s son in their eyes. And to Schlatt’s allies, he’s a traitor.” Achilles finished what she couldn’t say.

She tried to shove through the crowd, but it was no use, they were packed so tightly there was no getting through.

“People are going to get crushed if we don’t intervene.” Achilles noted, looking to his brother for a plan. Orpheus clasped his hands behind his back, already surveying the rioters for a plan.

“Get me inside.” Niki grabbed Lethe’s shoulder. “Quickly.”

“Nemesis wait, please think this through.” Wilbur tried. “They need us out here.”

“And he needs me in there, and we need him. If not because I can’t lose him, then because he is the best witness we have to everything Schlatt has done. If he dies, they’re going to get away with it.

“Please. He’s like a little brother to me. I can’t lose him.” Ranboo shrugged apologetically at the others but none of the brothers made any real move to stop him.

“Go.” Achilles said at last, a sympathetic look in his eyes. “We can manage.”

She didn’t risk waiting long enough for them to change their minds. “Tommy, help me. You’re the only other person he trusts.” She threw her hand out towards him in desperation. He didn’t even have time to agree, not that he would have said no.

The noise and heat of the square faded away as they reappeared in the corridor Tommy knew from a lifetime ago, meeting Tubbo for the second time while Kristin was in a meeting. It seemed so alien now, and shattered. The place was wrecked, furniture turned upside down, glass littered across the floor, a small fire burning in a bookshelf.

Ranboo hovered, no idea what to do, or where to even start. “Lethe go help them.” Niki ordered. “Icarus and I can search.”

“Are you sure? I want to make sure he’s alright.”

“If there’s a crowd crush like Orpheus thinks they’ll need all hands on deck to stop injuries. They need you.” Ranboo wavered, loathe to go but he did as Niki ordered, clearly needing some kind of direction. Tommy turned to survey what they’d entered into.

It was chaos inside, looting and pillaging already in full swing, shouting and crashing echoing down the halls, and given how the riches of the house had been built on so much blood neither of them really cared to stop it.

“Tubbo!” Niki sprinted ahead. “Where are you!”

A shape suddenly shimmered into view in front of them, blocking their path, forming into a familiar pale blonde figure holding a gun. “About time you showed up.”

“Purpled. What are you doing here?” Tommy stared at him.

“Same as you probably.” He reloaded his pistol casually. “Hunting down Schlatt’s men. I’m after Quackity.” Tommy looked confused. “He’s the supply man.”

“You can’t kill him.” He said, aghast. Purpled gave him a dead eyed stare.

“Why not? He wouldn’t hesitate to do the same, actually he didn’t, remember? He’s the one that secured the gun trade for Schlatt the night before the hospital, the one that shot you.”

“Jester? That’s what L-. Void called him.”

“You can say Lethe, we know who he is.” Purpled cut him off. “That’s the code name Enforcers have for him, sure. I tried to hunt him down on the night of the explosion but I missed my chance. I won’t miss again.” He stuffed his gun inside his belt, saluting them both. “So long Theseus. Just don’t get in my way.”

“Purpled!” Tommy started forward but Niki grabbed his arm, pulling him back. “Purpled wait!”

“Let him go Tommy.”

“He’s going to kill someone!”

“We have work to do. Quackity will be far away by now, we have time. Tubbo doesn’t.” They began to search, Tommy dragging aside curtains as if Tubbo would just be hiding behind them.

Room after room was destroyed, some still with looters in. The few that had made it inside stayed far away from them, clearly thinking what Purpled had, that they were here to kill. There was no sign of Tubbo, he’d vanished like a ghost.

“He’s not in his room, or Schlatt’s office. The greenhouse! Check the greenhouse.” Niki sprinted past. He could only follow, not knowing his way around the place and scared of losing her.

The greenhouse was mostly untouched, the plants a strange haven in all this madness. Tubbo’s beehives had been overturned out in the garden, a hybrid with delicate antenna standing by them, the bees swirling around her before she vanished around the corner, her new small friends following her in an angry swarm.

Tommy felt a twinge of sadness, a shred of empathy for Tubbo who’d loved those bees, or at the very least, had loved the distraction they gave him from the day to day life in the mansion. Maybe it was a welcome release from an unwelcome reminder, he didn’t know, but for now he mourned a little for all that the strange little goat hybrid had lost.

Moments later a scream echoed down the hallway. Tommy shot up, his heart pounding. “What was that?”

“Go look.” Niki ordered. “Make sure no one’s coming.” Tommy nodded, poking his head out the door to look left and right before running to see what was going on. An Enforcer lay on the ground in the next room, screaming and clawing at his face, which was covered in reddish weals. The bee hybrid stood over him, turning to run when she saw him coming.

Tommy averted his eyes, turning back as quickly as possible, ducking back into the greenhouse.

“Tubbo!” Niki was tearing aside the bushes in desperation, looking up and down for him. “Hello?” The sleeve of green sweater appeared tucked around the side of the shed at the back.

“He’s here.” Tommy yelled. The boy was curled up in a ball near the shed, his back to the wall, his eyes scrunched closed in pain. “Tubbo it’s us.”

Niki was faster, an inhuman cry ripping from her mouth, throwing herself forward, dropping on her knees beside him.

“Tubbo?” She tried to pry his arms away from his stomach but he wouldn’t let her, trying to curl up tighter.

“It’s us. It’s Icarus, Theseus, whatever.” Tommy shook his shoulder. “Tubbo, come on.”

His eyes peeled open, his head tilting slowly, as if afraid of what he’d see. The moment his eyes landed on Niki all of the fight went out of him, he collapsed limp against the wall, tears gathering at the corner of his eyes.

“I’m sorry, I’m so sorry.”

“It’s alright, we’re here now.” Niki took his hand in hers. “We’re here.” She took in the state of him, his eyes puffy, face pale. “What happened?”

“I was stupid.” Tubbo curled up in a ball, his breathing faint. “I thought I could talk to him, get him to see reason, maybe stand the Enforcers down, convince him he could salvage his reputation if he ended it now-.”

He cut off, choking, gasping for air.

“Easy, easy.” Niki knelt down beside him. “You’re safe now. You’re safe.”

“You idiot. You went after him alone?” Tommy stared at him. Tubbo wiped his eyes with his sleeve, nodding slightly.

“Shh it’s okay. It’s alright.” Niki hushed him gently. She finally managed to lift his arm, eyes widening in horror. His sweater was stained with blood underneath, a small bullet hole just below his ribs.

“I’m sorry. I’m sorry I thought I could talk sense into him.” Tubbo managed. “Get him to stand down, maybe stop the violence, I thought he might see some advantage in it...” He went off into a fit of coughing again.

“He shot you.” He remained standing, feeling a little hollow, looking down at his friend.

“I tried to call for help but I didn’t know who’d answer. It was stupid, I’m sorry, it was so stupid.”

“He did this?” Tommy didn’t realise how much venom was loaded into those words until they were out of his mouth.

“Tommy...” Niki trailed off, her attention shifting back to Tubbo as he struggled to breathe.

“Whatever you’re going to do, don’t do it.”

“Where is he?” Tommy rose to his feet, feeling the blind rage rising in him again. Niki saw it, saw the red light wrapping around his fists. She shook her head but he was far beyond listening to her now.

“Tubbo where is he.”

“Tommy, remember why we’re here.” Tommy couldn’t hear her, blood rushing in his ears.

“Where is he Tubbo.”

“Painting, first floor, the one with the bullet hole in, I showed you it once.” Tubbo whispered.

“There’s a hidden room behind there, a shelter. You have to hurry, he left minutes ago, he’ll be destroying evidence, I tried to stop him but well...” He didn’t finish, but it was clear what he meant.

Tommy saw red.

His feet were carrying him out of the room before he even quite knew what he was doing, Niki yelling for him to stop but he didn’t listen. He drew to a halt in the corridor of paintings, some already stolen, the past presidents portraits torn or defaced. The Tommy that had walked down here a lifetime ago wouldn’t recognise him now

The attempted arrest of the Agency, the destruction of Haven, Pandora, and now Tubbo, it was all too much.

Whatever his breaking point was, he’d reached it, all the hurt and anger and loss of a short lifetime condensing into one moment, driven on by that rush that the crowd had given him, blood pounding in his ears, making him feel like he could do anything. It was a dangerous mix.

He tore the painting aside with a strength he didn’t even know he had, revealing a metal vault door behind it. It was heavy, easily several tons of reinforced steel. Seconds later it was torn clean from its hinges, slamming into the other wall, wrecking the wooden paneling.

He reached for the knife in his belt, ready for a fight, advancing down the narrow corridor beyond, towards a dim light at the end, no idea what he’d find.

The room beyond came slowly into view, the bunker inside was a mess, a tiny cramped metal box with a desk in the middle, a wall of screens at the far end.

The shelves all around the side were in disarray, the folders on them tossed everywhere. The floor had been covered with crumpled paper, broken glass and boxes. A half torn file in the corner had jammed the paper shredder, a bowl of water on top with what looked like two hard drives in it.

And in the centre, in a creased waistcoat and torn shirt, sprawled in a red velvet armchair, was the president himself.

“Schlatt!”

The president spun around, knocking over a jar of pens on his desk as he did so. He had a wild eyed expression, his hair flying, a hard drive clutched in his fist. He tried to drop it into the bowl of water but Icarus kicked it over, spilling it all out into the carpet.

“You.” The words were laced with spittle and vitriol, Schlatt’s chest heaving. It was barely past his lips before he dived for the desk, fumbling for a small pistol that lay on it, the safety flicking off almost in slow motion.

He had no time to react. The sound was deafening in the confined space, echoing off the walls, reverberating through his bones.

His vision cleared a moment later. His ears were ringing, he felt frozen in place. But the bullet hovered between his thumb and fingers, slicing through the tension that hung so delicately in the air, inches from his head.

Schlatt stared at him, and then at the gun, and kept pulling the trigger, but there was nothing, an empty clicking sound at most.

“Fuck. Wasted my bullets on that stupid boy. Shit.” He shook it, as if that would help, before throwing it down on the desk, snatching a bottle of something off his desk, taking another gulp.

Tommy didn’t respond, a little lost for words. “So Theseus. Icarus, is that what they call you now?” Despite his state he was still relatively coherent, his words only a little slurred. “I was expecting the others.”

“Don’t.” He cut him off before he could say any more, still taking in the carnage inside the bunker. “Don’t even try. You can’t scare me.”

“I knew I should have killed you when I had the chance.” The president carried on, beginning to laugh, a sort of broken, choked sound, taking another swig from his bottle. “You and your brothers. But you were useful to me, at least for a little while.”

Tommy took a deep breath, regretting it as the bruise on his side stretched, sending lacerations of pain across his ribs.

“It wasn’t me. It was Archangel you should have killed.” He said as steadily as he could. “Without him none of this would have happened.”

“That fucker.” He went off into a string of expletives. Tommy could only watch half in horror.

Whatever he expected, it wasn’t this. Anything but this. Schlatt regained his composure, trying to get some semblance of control back, picking up a glass of something strong and sitting back in his chair if he still had some shred of dignity.

“Tell me, how did you crack Pandora.” He lifted the glass, taking a long sip. “I’m curious.”

“We walked in the front door.” Icarus’s smile was sharp, but Schlatt couldn’t see it behind the mask. He waved this aside dismissively.

“Oh it was old, weak, the systems were failing. It was a matter of time really. Shame really, I had a lot of investments poured into that, but you were afraid of it for years and that’s all that mattered.”

“All this just because you hated someone being stronger than you.” He breathed. “You’re pathetic.”

“Oh I never hated meta-humans.” Schlatt began to laugh madly, interrupted by hiccups. “Truth be told, I didn’t give a shit. You were a means to an end, nothing more. I got rich off people like you.”

“You’re going to hell.”

“Do I care? I won.” He grinned, a nasty smile that didn’t reach his eyes, full of teeth. “I lived a life of luxury and power, I had everything I ever wanted.”

“And now we’re taking it all away.”

The president began to laugh again, a cold, drunken laugh that sent chills down Icarus’s spine. He reached for his knife, fury clawing at his throat, holding it tight in his fist.

“Go on then.” A hiccup broke past his lips and he jolted in his seat, pressing his hand to his mouth before beginning to giggle again, maniacal almost. “Kill me.”

“Sit down.”

Schlatt stared up at him blearily. He was red faced, his eyes half lidded and clearly unfocused. “What did you say to me.”

“I said, Sit. Down.” The words came out as little more than a snarl, forced through gritted teeth. Tommy could feel his hair rising, pieces of paper floating off the floor. Around the room small items began to lift into the air, glowing faintly red, a stapler, a pen, a clock, the bowl of water.

The president slid into his chair. The anger died as soon as it sparked.

It was...pathetic. This man, this president, this looming presence for all his life, the shadow that he had spent his childhood looking over his shoulder for, as if it followed him. He was pathetic.

The ashes on the desk, the strewn books, his suit tossed aside, the wine stained shirt. Not a distant figure of authority, not the face of the campaign against them, not the creator of the Enforcers. This wasn’t some smart composed villain like he looked on screen with his prepared speeches and cruel smile, not some remote, unstoppable malicious entity, almost godlike in power as he’d become.

He looked like nothing at all, just a man and a broken one at that, a depraved light dancing in his eyes.

“You know, I used to be afraid of you.” Tommy said at last, lost for any other words.

“You still are.” Schlatt said, grinning. “Theo, Thomas, Theseus, Icarus. How many names until you realise you can’t win. You should have killed me the moment you walked in.”

“I wanted to understand-.”

“Oh fuck you and your understanding. What is there to understand. Your people made me rich. Kill me then, like you came to do, like your little ally is stalking Quackity for, what’s one more death in all the destruction you’ve created. Since you’re so grown up and brave and-.”

He was cut off by another hiccup. Tommy looked at the president slumped in his chair, shirt stained with alcohol and god knows whatever else.

Eret, Hannah, Tubbo, all the heroes before him, the faceless Syndicate member who’d died, countless meta humans hiding in safe houses or trying to flee across the border, all of Schlatt’s victims weighed heavy on him in that moment. He was torn in all directions, heart heavy with a lifetime of grief much too old for him.

“You’d stab a poor defenceless man?” He mocked him, but even so Tommy could see the fear in his eyes.

This was a coward, nothing more, nothing less, hand straying towards a pair of scissors as if they could save him in the event the meta lunged for the kill. His show of dramatics was just that, a show, a facade he hid behind even now.

The wind still rushed in his ears. Tommy reached out, plucking the bullet from the air where it hovered between them, slipping it into his pocket. He stuffed his knife into his belt after it.

“I came here to kill you. But I won’t.”

Schlatt froze. He saw the shock register, slowly at first and then faster and faster, crawling over his face.

“My god. You’re going to show me mercy.” He laughed maniacally. “You fucking idiot, you’re even madder than I thought you were.”

“I get that a lot.” Tommy quipped.

“Is that how you think this ends? You do some dramatic show that you’re not going to kill me, you want me to admit what I did, to regret it like that stupid son of mine. You people are ridiculous, but very amusing.”

Tommy felt the anger surge again, every bone in his body screaming to strike, to lash out, but he focused instead on securing his knife, letting all his attention focus on positioning it exactly right on his belt, not that that mattered.

“My mum raised me better than that.” He said with a forced calm, and a hint of pride. Schlatt snorted at that, but Tommy didn’t care. “Maybe I should say thanks or something, since you were stupid enough to put me with the one person who could bring me back to my brothers.”

“This is what you’re waiting for? Sentimentality? This is why your lot never got anywhere.”

He remembered the boy, Chayanne, in Ranboo’s arms, crying. Tallulah clinging to him as they ran. How Goose had walked up to him in the rain the day he burned Eret’s shop down, and the way the same cat had laid so docile in Tallulah’s arms, as if knowing it was safe there.

He saw his brother’s faces, Techno patient and understanding, and then Wilbur, that strange look he wore as he locked the prison warden’s door, compassion, of a twisted kind. How the people he’d freed from Pandora had run into the sunlight, how they’d cheered. He let it go, let his power fizzle out at his fingertips. Let it sink into the ground.

“I don’t think it’s mercy.” He said at last. “I hope they tear you apart. I hope you *rot* .”

Schlatt laughed even harder. “You don’t want to get your hands dirty. And there was me thinking it was some stupid ideal of justice.”

Tommy stayed silent. Schlatt leaned forward, knocking some of the files a little clumsily around as he did so.

“Listen boy, I can make you an offer. All you have to do is tell me the names of the people you worked with, the Syndicate and I can make you rich. I can give you everything, diplomatic immunity, I can sign those laws that you want, I’ll even let you leave the country, no questions asked. Your accomplices will be prosecuted, yes but we’ll have peace again and you can have your damn rights or whatever it is you want.”

“You really mean it don’t you.” Tommy could only stare at him. He saw a light spark in the president’s eyes, mistaking the disgust for interest. “I know what you did to the last man you offered that. I was the one who recorded it all.” He took a step closer, standing over him. “When they play it at your trial, I want you to know it was me.”

“Oh, you still believe in justice.” Schlatt mocked him. “You still think this will be fair, there’ll be a fair trial, a fair punishment, that you can trust the systems that raised you.”

Every emotion under the sun was washing over him regret, anger, satisfaction, hatred, almost pity for the disgusting shadow of a man in front of him. Almost.

“I don’t.” Tommy replied, anger singing under his tone, just barely held in check with a restraint he didn’t even know he had. “Not even one bit. But you don’t get it, I don’t care, I want you to suffer.”

“You live in a fairytale.”

“Don’t try and change the subject.” He watched Schlatt’s expression shift slightly, clearly sensing

he'd lost all control of the conversation, the one thing he desperately clung to had all but slipped through his fingers. "I want you to feel afraid, I want you to see everyone hate your guts, and I want you to know that you lost, you *failed*. You don't get to run when your luck is down, not after everything you've done. You don't get to decide when you've had enough."

He reached down, slowly pouring the last of the water out to soak into the carpet so there was nothing left for Schlatt to destroy, holding eye contact as he did so just to enrage his enemy further. At last, a shred of fear broke through the former president's alcohol-addled state.

"You'll regret this." He warned. He clawed at the arms of his chair, trying to push himself up. "You'll regret this!"

Tommy didn't answer, turning away, head up, eyes fixed on the other wall. The last of the anger fizzled away, turning into acceptance of a kind, a peace within himself he'd never had before.

"Take my offer Theseus, it's the last chance you'll have!" Tommy kept walking. "Don't turn your back to me! Theseus!" He drew to a halt in the doorway, but he didn't look back, silhouetted against the light.

"Theseus is dead. You're going to wish you were too."

Chapter End Notes

This is the first chapter to make me so nervous i not only had to have someone beta read it, thanks Taylor you're a legend, I didn't post it as soon as I was finished, but hey, here we are

The epilogue will be coming some time soon, but yeah, we're nearly there, the end of the road is nearly here. I feel kind of emotional, look at my boy WHT!Tommy, he's all grown up. He defied everything he was made to be, shook off Schlatt's attempts to control him, he's unrecognisable from the boy he was in the best way, shaped by his family and all the people he trusts.

I have a lot of thoughts and emotions right now but I can't possibly put them into words yet, that's for the epilogue chapter note but yeah. 16k words, the longest chapter yet

(Small note due to recent events the last chapter is slightly on hold until I can rewrite certain characters out)

End Notes

Mumza isn't going to die, don't worry

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